

FLIGHT

Written by
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White:	Aug. 27, 2011
Blue:	Sep. 25, 2011
Pink:	Oct. 10, 2011
Yellow:	Oct. 19, 2011
Green:	Oct. 24, 2011
Goldenrod:	Nov. 04, 2011
Buff:	Nov. 08, 2011
Salmon:	Nov. 22, 2011
Cherry:	Dec. 06, 2011
Tan:	Dec. 12, 2011

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CHYRON -- ATLANTA 6:12 AM

EXT. SOMEWHAT SEEDY TWO-STORY HOTEL IN ATLANTA -- PRE-DAWN

It's still more night than day as we look down on the HOTEL ATLANTA. The lit sign for the HOTEL ATLANTA may be the only source of light as we hear a metallic rattle.

EXT. HOTEL ATLANTA -- SECOND FLOOR -- PRE-DAWN

We follow the metallic rattle to a door. The rattling stops and we watch the knob slowly turn.

Tight on a feminine arm with a tattoo that announces "hope." We pull back to find that both arms are employed in the pulling of what looks like a large suitcase.

NICOLE MAGGEN, a beautiful but tired woman, finishes pulling the suitcase that we now surmise to be a folded-up massage table out of the motel room. With her bra in one hand and the rickety table resting against the wall of the exterior 2nd floor hallway of the motel, she assesses her situation.

She digs in her purse, lights a cigarette and continues digging in her purse. She finds a beat-up candy tin. She opens it and quickly sorts through a collection of burnt foils, heroin foils, looking for residue. Nothing.

She now finds and holds up the 100 bucks she just made. She flips open her cheap phone and makes a call...she thinks better of it and hangs up.

EXT. HOTEL ATLANTA -- PARKING LOT -- MOMENTS LATER

NICOLE forces the clumsy table into the hatchback of a 1988 Toyota Tercel and slams it shut.

INT. 1988 TOYOTA TERCEL -- PARKING LOT -- SAME TIME

We hear the electronic ring of her cheap cell phone on "speaker phone" mode. The phone rests on the passenger seat. We pull up to find NICOLE slumped with her head resting on the steering wheel. She is exhausted and irritated...

NICOLE
(as the phone rings)
Don't pick up...don't pick up...
don't pick up...

A MAN answers with music in the background..."Yo.." NICOLE quickly picks up the phone.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

It's Nic, do you have any? Good morning to you too. You're what? Well, where are you guys shooting today? Where? Text me the address. You have some...Okay.

She hangs up the phone and catching herself in the rearview she tries to smile.

CHYRON -- **ORLANDO 7:14 AM**

EXT. AMERICAN VALUE SUITES - HOTEL -- ORLANDO -- MORNING

The sun would be rising if the sky wasn't swirling with grey clouds. We see the American Suites Hotel and recognize it as a decent commuters' hotel near the airport in Orlando. The sound of a clock radio breaks the calm of our picture.

INT. AMERICAN VALUE SUITES - HOTEL -- ORLANDO -- MORNING

Through the clock radio we loudly hear two morning drive-time radio personalities spewing nonsensical patter...

An attractive YOUNG WOMAN wrestles free of the covers and gets out of bed. She crosses naked through the room as a cell phone starts ringing.

Back to the bed as **WHIP WHITAKER** rises into frame and inhabits the room like a lazy ape at the zoo. WHIP wears his 40 some years of life experience like a medal. Smoke hangs in the air and empty beers, a pint of vodka and two empty carafes of cheap hotel wine clutter the table as WHIP snatches up his phone and answers...

VOICE

For the love of Christ! Look...just hold...HOLD ON.

He aggressively drains the last four inches of beer from a clear bottle and cracks the last fresh one that bobs in the hotel ice bucket.

The naked, YOUNG WOMAN bends over to pick up her clothes.

We witness her ass as a tanned glass vase with a perfect crack down the middle. Whip smiles, taking it all in...

WHIP

(into the phone)

I've been up since the crack 'a dawn. What check? Tuition? How much does it cost to go there?

The YOUNG WOMAN has re-lit the last half of a joint and is puffing it to life as WHIP is beckoning with his large hands.

The YOUNG WOMAN, looking more like a stripper by the second, hands the joint to WHIP who takes a masterful drag. WHIP shakes his head in violent disapproval to what he hears on the phone. He exhales in anger as he shouts into the phone.

WHIP (CONT'D)

NO! NO! NO! You decided he needed private school...lemme talk to Knuckles. He's not? Tell'em the phone works both ways. Oh he's *my* son because you need a tuition check...that's great Deana. I'm glad you tracked me down in Orlando at 7 in the fucking morning to shake me down for money. Does he even like the fucking school? No I've never seen it. Yeah I wonder why not too. I gotta 9 o'clock flight, sit tight 'till I get back to Atlanta. How am I a liar? What? No, I'll call you.

WHIP hangs up and continues to make quick work of the last beer as he stares through his thoughts and out the window.

YOUNG WOMAN

Was that your wife?

WHIP

That was my ex-wife. But you Trina, you could be my second or third wife if you'd just C'mere.

The YOUNG WOMAN we now know as TRINA smiles seductively...

TRINA

Whip, don't even joke about that. Our flight's at 9, let's hit it.

TRINA is still naked but she holds a navy blue skirt and a white blouse as she hands WHIP his pants. WHIP can't help but pat that perfect ass as TRINA tries to skip away.

ON THE RADIO We hear the opening bars of a familiar rock anthem...**JOE COCKER's "I'm Feeling Alright"**

WHIP

Yeah, I'm feelin' a little light-headed. I shoulda ate somethin'.

WHIP leans over the motel table, picks up a soda straw that's been cut in half. He efficiently sniffs up a line of coke.

INT. AMERICAN VALUE SUITES HOTEL-ORLANDO-HALLWAY-MORNING

WHIP wears his pilot Blues and carries his hat as he strides confidently down the hallway. JOE COCKER continues to wail, perfectly narrating the hero's swagger that WHIP maintains while passing bad light fixtures and ornate wall paper.

EXT. AIRPORT SOUTHJET TARMAC - AIRPLANE - MORNING RAINING

WHIP leans against the landing gear of the JACKSON-RIDGEFIELD 88 PASSENGER JET -- He takes a swig from a small bottle of mouthwash -- gargles, then spits the green foam on the tarmac. WHIP wipes fatigue from his face as he stashes the mouthwash in his pocket, then quickly completes his visual walk around. He looks at the sky again as he steps on to the jet way ladder. His foot slips, sending his shoe SPLASHING in to a puddle.

WHIP

Son of a bitch!

Whip shakes the rain out of his shoe as he continues up the stairs.

INT. ORLANDO AIRPORT TERMINAL - JETWAY -- DAY

WHIP enters the jetway from the exterior door at the entrance of the plane. TRINA is greeting a MAN and his SON.

WHIP

Morning Miss Marquez.

TRINA

Morning Captain Whitaker.

WHIP waits as TRINA politely parts the stream of folks to allow WHIP to enter the plane.

INT. AIRPLANE GALLEY -- MOMENTS LATER

WHIP exchanges a look with a MATURE FLIGHT ATTENDANT, **MARGARET THOMASON**. She can't help but smile...

MARGARET

Captain Whitaker, that sky gonna hold? You're not gonna make me spend another night in Orlando?

WHIP

Don't worry, Margaret I'm gonna get you home for your prayer meeting at...what is it? Jesus Christ Superstar 27th Baptist King Church?

TRINA and **CAMELIA SATOU**, the other flight attendant, laugh.

MARGARET

That's right, Christ the King First Baptist Church on Hazel and 9th Street. And I'm still saving you a seat next to me. Offer stands...come on down.

WHIP

One of these nights, Margaret, I'm comin'. You hold my seat.

The girls laugh at the familiar exchange.

INT. AIRPLANE COCKPIT - MORNING

WHIP enters the cockpit, removes his hat and nods to **KEN EVANS**, our clean-cut, young first officer.

WHIP

G'morning. Walk around is complete.

Whip pulls his emergency oxygen mask off the bulkhead and takes a huge hit.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Emergency oxygen, checks.
(offering the mask to
Evans)
You want a hit?

EVANS

No thank you sir.

WHIP

(tries to break the chill)
My pleasure to share the chair with ya'. Didn't we fly together...

EVANS lets him hang...

EVANS

No sir, not that I remember. Ken Evans, sir.

WHIP

Call me Whip.

EVANS

Yes sir.

WHIP studies this little Bible Thumper for a second before...

WHIP

(calls to the galley)
Margaret.
(she appears)
Sweetie, will you get me a coffee, black, lots of sugar. And some aspirin. You want something?

EVANS

(looks to Margaret)
No ma'am. Thank you.
(she leaves)
Sir, it's 8:50.

WHIP

Then let's push. I got a great 'on time' record.

EVANS

Yes sir, you gottit. And how you feeling today, sir?

WHIP focuses on EVANS, trying to read into that statement.

WHIP

Tired, sir. But, this is a quick turn for me. Ten turns in three days. Off tomorrow.

MARGARET returns with the coffee, placing it down near WHIP's chair on an airline cocktail napkin.

MARGARET

Here's your coffee and the final manifest. 102 souls on board.

WHIP

Thank you, thank you, thank you, you're a life saver. And Margaret gettem' tucked in, we're ready to push.

WHIP goes to the head. MARGARET and EVANS exchange a look.

CUT TO:

EXT. ATLANTA SUBURB - STONE MANSION - DRIVEWAY - DAY

NICOLE gets out of her Tercel and slams the door twice before it closes. She checks the address on her phone and looks up at the enormous mansion.

INT. ATLANTA -- STONE - MANSION - DAY

NICOLE pushes through the overly tall front door of the house. At first glance, it's completely empty, unfurnished. A GUY in cargo pants and a baseball hat sleeps sitting up against the huge dual staircase that leads to the second floor. Random boxes of video equipment are now evident as are thick cables that lead to a staircase going down.

On the staircase she immediately encounters another YOUNG CREW GUY holding a tiny lap dog while standing next to a NAKED GIRL wearing a Shakespearean Military Helmet. The YOUNG CREW GUY holds up the "be quiet" finger to his lips.

NICOLE quietly makes her way down a few steps, stopping at the odd duo. We now hear activity downstairs, music. SUDDENLY the YOUNG CREW GUY frantically points at the NAKED GIRL.

NAKED GIRL IN HELMET

Othello you bastard!

And she grabs the TINY DOG and hustles downstairs. NICOLE waits with the YOUNG CREW GUY until we hear....

KIP (O.S.)

CUT! CUT THAT!

NICOLE is free to walk all the way downstairs now.

INT. MANSION - OTHELLO PORN SET - BEDROOM SUITE - DAY

NICOLE enters to reveal a large porn set with a Shakespearean theme, specifically "Othello." We see an Elizabethan Four-poster bed with a canopy surrounded by stone arches and cardboard Venetian Columns. In the bed we find an AFRICAN AMERICAN PORN ACTOR laying with TWO FEMALE ADULT ACTORS.

A **GIRL WITH DYED-BLONDE HAIR** stands naked next to the throne smoking a joint as she shaves her crotch with a man's electric razor.

NICOLE approaches a **YOUNG TATTOOED MAN** who only wears board shorts. He's talking with an **OLDER ASIAN MAN** as they groom a pile of coke for snorting.

NICOLE

Kip-

He sniffs a quick line and gets up to kiss her, she turns her cheek avoiding the coke-frozen kiss.

KIP

Nicole, this is Tiki Pot. He's my partner in this new series, he knows a lot about porn.

NICOLE

Kip I need 2 grams of "h."

KIP

Tiki and I are trying to put the narrative back in porn. Our Desdemona hasn't shown yet.

(a great idea hatches...)

You should play Desdemona. FUCK YEAH! You got that fair skin.

KIP is flirting, seeing if she'll consider it...

NICOLE

Desdemona? What the fuck?

TIKI does a line and comes up babbling.

TIKI POT

She do anal, two thousand, one hour.

NICOLE

I don't do porn, Kip. Just lemme see the "h."

KIP

Just listen, we're doing an Othello theme where the Moor finds you in bed with your nurse and-

NICOLE

He fucks me in the ass?

KIP

Well...yeah. We're giving a whole new meaning to the "beast with two backs." That's actually a title we're toying with... 'beast with two backs' or Hole-thelo or Butt Hole-thelo...would you be up for it?

TIKI POT

College kid, very clean...BRETT?!

A tall thin kid joins them. He wears a Moorish Headdress and has a bath towel wrapped around his waist.

TIKI POT (CONT'D)

Show her the pipe-

BRETT drops the towel...

NICOLE

Fuck you Tiki, you put that in your ass and call me in the morning. Kip, have I ever done that shit for you? Never. Asshole.

NICOLE walks away. KIP follows her...at the door.

KIP

Nic...sorry, we're tweaked, okay baby girl. Hey, c'mon you wanna stay and shoot some stills for me, you're pics are awesome. And what's going on with you? You were clean for a while and...

(she begins to cry)

Sweetheart, don't cry.

NICOLE

I just need a little to smoke.

(flashes the cash)

I've got 100.

KIP pulls a small tin foil square from his vest pocket.

KIP

No, keep your money, okay? But, Nicole, this is the Taliban baby, very big time. It will take you down.

NICOLE

I can handle it.

KIP (cont'd)
 Don't shoot this shit, it is way
 too heavy.

NICOLE
 I'm just gonna smoke it. I haven't
 done needles in weeks.

KIP
 Okay, no needles and take a little
 coke and if you start going down
 just whiff a little. Okay? I
 wanna see you...

KIP hands her a tiny baggy of coke. He kisses her cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. COCKPIT -- MORNING

Out the window...nothing...the rain pounds. WHIP leans close
 to the windshield in an attempt to improve his view.

EVANS reaches down and throws a switch. The windshield
 wipers go on. We can now see very clearly the path of lights
 the plane is to follow. WHIP looks to EVANS, smiles with
 stoned eyes.

WHIP
 Thanks junior.

EVANS looks out at the rain...

EVANS
 Looks pretty ugly, sir.

WHIP
 A little rain never hurt anybody.
 We're not made of sugar. What's
 the RVR?

EVANS
 Half a mile. Right at minimums.
 Wind's gusting to 29. 30 is our
 crosswind max.

WHIP
 I know what our crosswind max is.
 Tellem were good to go at the end.

EVANS just stares at WHIP.

GROUND CONTROL
 (on radio)
 SouthJet 227, say intentions.

WHIP looks right at EVANS. EVANS keys the radio.

EVANS
 Orlando ground. SouthJet 227 will
 be ready to go at the end.

WHIP stares forward, not looking at EVANS.

INT. PASSENGER CABIN - DAY

Nervous passengers stare out the windows as the JR-88 lumbers along the tarmac, headed for the runway.

We follow TRINA whose ass looks as good in a tight navy skirt as it does split bare with orange fluorescence. MARGARET speaks into the PA mic.

MARGARET
 Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has turned on the seat-belt sign. Please be sure your seat-belts are securely fastened, and all carry-on items are safely stored in the overhead bin, or under the seat in front of you. Also, all personal electronic devices must be switched off, at this time. Today's flight time to Atlanta should be 52 minutes. Flight attendants please take your seats.

16 TRINA straps into her jump-seat.

16

INT. COCKPIT -- MORNING -- POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

Heavy rain lashes the nose of the plane. Lightning FLASHES. We watch the plane steer on to the GLOWING center-line.

INT. COCKPIT

Whip inhales his coffee and readies himself for take-off. EVANS tries to relax, continuing with the checklist.

EVANS
 (reading the check-list)
 Elevator trim - set. Flaps, One,
 two, three - set. Radios - set.

One, two, three altimeters - set.
 Lights, pitot heat, de-ice - on.
 Transponders, set.

TOWER

(on radio)

SouthJet 227, wind is one-zero-zero
 at seventeen. Runway 18L, cleared
 for take off.

WHIP has razor focus as he places his hand on the throttle.
 EVANS sits upright and prepares for battle.

EVANS

(keys the mic)

Cleared for take off, SouthJet 227.

Whip pushes the throttles and the engines SCREAM as they
 spool up to full thrust. After a beat, he releases the
 brakes.

INT. PASSENGER CABIN - DAY

The passengers are pressed into their seats like blades of
 grass as the breeze of the plane's momentum moves them
 towards flight. The main lights in the cabin go out and the
 small glow of the aisle lights lead us back to the cockpit.

INT. AIRPLANE COCKPIT - DAY

WHIP mans the stick as he squints his eyes and tries to keep
 the nose between the lights of the runway.

WHIP

It's like a video game, right?

WHIP laughs and turns to his copilot. EVANS is visibly
 nervous as he begins the take-off check...

EVANS

Airspeed's alive, both sides...
 Engine instruments are in the
 green...100 knots crosscheck...

The JR-88 fishtails as the main gear begins to hydroplane.

WHIP

Yep, nothing like a little 30 knot
 cross wind to exercise that
 sphincter muscle.

Evans is jostled violently.

EVANS

That's wind shear! A micro burst!

Whip's eyes are focused on the end of the runway.

The RED THRESHOLD LIGHTS are approaching fast. The plane is not lifting off.

EVANS (CONT'D)

Less than a thousand feet to go!

Whip snaps at him.

WHIP

Just watch my airspeed!

C.U. The airspeed indicator reads 145...

EVANS

V1...and...

Now the air speed indicator climbs to 160...

EVANS (CONT'D)

...rotate.

Whip pulls back on the yoke, and...

The plane jerks up and we can hear the fuselage flex as we leave the ground. The plane is immediately buffeted by severe turbulence.

EVANS (CONT'D)

That's wind shear for sure!

WHIP

Yeehaw! Ride 'em cowboy.

INT. PASSENGER CABIN - DAY

The passengers are rattled like a bag of marbles.

INT. COCKPIT - DAY

The plane is loping up as the rain continues to pound the windshield. The ascent is very bumpy as the turbulent wind tosses the plane side to side. Copilot EVANS is communicating with Air Traffic Control...

EVANS

Orlando Departure...SouthJet 227,
climbing out of 2500 for 5
thousand, runway heading.

ATC

(on radio)

Roger SouthJet 227. Turn left
heading one-seven-zero. Climb,
maintain niner thousand.

EVANS

Left to 170. Climb, maintain niner
thousand.

EVANS quickly dials the heading and altitude into the auto-pilot.

WHIP

I don't want the auto-pilot. I'm
flying.

ATC

(on radio)

What's your ride like, SouthJet
227?

Before EVANS can answer, WHIP jumps on the radio.

WHIP

Ah, Departure, we've got some rough
chop here. I'd say moderate to...

WHUMP!! The plane hits a severe bump! EVAN's headset turns sideways and he quickly rights it. WHIP chokes back a nervous chuckle.

WHIP (CONT'D)

(into his mic)

No, severe. Definitely severe
turbulence. No meal service today.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

Roger that.

Whump!! Once again the plane is violently rocked.

INT. PASSENGER CABIN - DAY

The passengers audibly HOWL as the roller coaster dip lifts most of their stomachs into their throats. A few overhead luggage bins fly open and bags and coats rain down.

The THREE ATTENDANTS calmly collect the luggage and stow it in the kitchen. They talk loudly for the benefit of the passengers.

TRINA

(to a passenger)

This happened last week, always
bumpy outta Orlando. Right Cam?

MARGARET grabs the cabin mic and addresses the passengers.

MARGARET

Ladies and Gentlemen, the captain
has asked that until we clear this
air you stay seated with your seat
belts fastened. Thank you.

INT. COCKPIT - DAY

The plane rocks and shutters. WHIP seems oblivious as he continues to serenade Evans.

WHIP

(singing)

*Feelin' alright -
Not feelin' too good myself -
Feelin' alright -
Not feelin' too good myself...*

WHIP is interrupted by Air Traffic Control.

ATC

(on radio)

SouthJet 227...Be advised there is
a large convective cell four miles
at your 11 o'clock. And another
cell, 2 o'clock, 10 miles. Both
moving rapidly.

EVANS

Copy, Center.

(to Whip)

Did you get that?

WHIP

Gottit Skippy. I'm just tryin' to
get birdie here outta this wind
bowl...What did they clear us to?

EVANS

We're cleared to Flight Level one-
eight-thousand.

THE PLANE TAKES ANOTHER VIOLENT DIP

EVANS' headset flies off. His tie and all the loose equipment and coffee cups are thrown to the ground.

WHIP

Goddamnit! Enough of this shit!

WHIP pushes the yoke forward. The plane pitches downward.

EVANS

What are you doing!?

WHIP

Leveling off.

EVANS

What!?

WHIP points to the MFD screen.

WHIP

See that sliver of blue sitting between those two ugly bastards?

C.U. MFD screen: A narrow line of blue is visible between the two monstrous convective cells.

WHIP (CONT'D)

That's a little pocket of smooth air squatting right over Lake Kissimmee...

EVANS nervously squints at the screen.

WHIP (CONT'D)

And we're gonna thread that fucking needle. Turn me thirty degrees right!

EVANS jumps on the radio.

EVANS

(into his mic)

Center. This is SouthJet 227, We need to divert 30 degrees right...

WHIP

For weather.

EVANS

(into his mic)

...for weather.

ATC
 SouthJet 227, this is Jacksonville
 Center. 30 Degrees, right,
 approved. Report back on course.

EVANS
 Report back on course.

WHIP banks the plane to the right.

Suddenly -- the plane falls 200 feet in 2 seconds.

A huge air pocket pulls the rug out from under the JR-88.
 From the cockpit we can hear the passengers scream. EVANS
 holds on to his headset.

EVANS (CONT'D)
 Oh, Lord!

WHIP
 He can't help you now, brother.

WHIP remains cool as he rides more bad air. The plane now
 bounces rapidly over a non-stop succession of speed bumps.

INT. PASSENGER CABIN - DAY

The passengers clutch each other as they rattle like bobble
 head dolls; it's getting worse.

INT. COCKPIT - DAY

WHIP pushes the throttle and the 17-year-old Jackson-
 Ridgefield JR-88 accelerates directly into a huge black
 cloud. He begins to dip the nose level to the ground.

EVANS
 Why are you leveling off, sir?

WHIP
 I'd like to spend less time in this
 shitty air, Kenny. Is that alright
 with you?

WHIP pushes the 17-year-old Jackson-Ridgefield JR-88 directly
 into a huge black cloud. He begins to dip the nose towards
 the ground.

EVANS
 We're approaching maximum airspeed!

WHIP
Fucking right! I'm gonna need some
speed to punch through this crap.

INT. PASSENGER CABIN - DAY

The passengers howl in fear as the plane pitches forward.

INT. COCKPIT - DAY

EVANS calls out to WHIP...

EVANS
You're over-speeding!

WHIP
Not yet!!

The AIRSPEED INDICATOR moves from GREEN right up to the
YELLOW line.

WHIP banks the plane steeply to the right. From the cabin we
HEAR the passengers SCREAM!

Now ATC comes on the radio...

ATC
(on radio)
Uh, SouthJet 227, this is
Jacksonville Center. Say altitude.

WHIP
Tell 'em we're climbing.

EVANS
(scared and lying badly)
Center...uh...SouthJet 227 is
leaving niner thousand...for Flight
Level 180.

ATC
(on radio)
SouthJet 227, this is Center. You
need to check your Mode-C. Your
transponder indicates you're
descending.

EVANS looks at WHIP -- panicked.

WHIP
You're useless Evans, shit!
(keys the radio)

Center. This is SouthJet 227, we've encountered some bad air here. Some pretty severe downdrafts. We're in our climb now.

ATC
(on radio)
Roger.

The shaking gets incredibly violent. WE HEAR SCREAMS from the cabin. Evans points to Whip's airspeed indicator.

EVANS
(terrified)
Look at your airspeed! You're too fast for this rough air!

WHIP
I'm right on the line Kenny. Right on the line.

WHIP starts to hum the Joe Cocker song again as he cranes his head up close to the windscreen -- looking intently at the dark sky.

WHIP (CONT'D)
C'mon sweetheart, show me the sun.

Suddenly, we see a beam of light breaking through the black clouds -- 12 o'clock high. A God ray.

WHIP (cont'd) (CONT'D)
Finally, daylight.

WHIP banks the plane hard, lifting the nose -- pointing it directly at the crack in the darkness. He shoves the throttles to full power.

The plane is banking, rising and accelerating.

INT. PASSENGER CABIN - DAY

The screaming passengers go quiet with the strange new development. The shaking has eased from a 10 to a 5.

INT. COCKPIT - DAY

Whip keeps the plane climbing steeply. The Vertical Speed Indicator shows we're ascending 2,000 feet per minute. The altimeter spins up past 12,000 ft.

The murky grey outside becomes lighter and brighter, until suddenly, in a dramatic reveal...

WE BREAK THROUGH THE CLOUDS!

Instantly the air becomes perfectly smooth.

Whip levels off and maneuvers between the two towering cloud walls -- smooth as silk.

Gliding over the fluffy white clouds and through the shimmering rays of the sun -- it feels like WHIP just flew the JR-88 into heaven.

A joyous CHEER ERUPTS from the passenger cabin

WHIP pulls the power back and switches on the auto-pilot. EVANS is cheery, almost giddy...

EVANS

Glad that's over.

WHIP, however, is very shaky and beaded with sweat.

WHIP

How tall are we?

EVANS

16 thousand. That was incredible sir...

WHIP

Ken, turn us north and take us home. Your plane.

EVANS looks at him and nods.

EVANS

My plane.

WHIP

(picks up the phone)
Margaret, I'm coming out.

WHIP hangs up, puts on his pilot hat and exits the cockpit.

EXT. NICOLE'S GEORGIAN GARDENS APTS FRONT DOOR-ATLANTA-DAY

NICOLE has her keys out as she hustles for her door. She looks to find the door slightly open. She pushes it fully open to see **FRAN**, the building manager, standing in her living room holding her camera. He tries to be casual...

FRAN
Where you been Nicole?

She is scared and pissed by his invasion of her space.

NICOLE
Fuck! Fran...get out.

FRAN
You're like a little ghost. I
never know when you're here.

NICOLE
Get the fuck out Fran!

She grabs the full-bodied 35 MM camera from him.

FRAN
As the building manager I have a
legal right to enter an apartment
if I believe the occupant is
unwell. Especially if said
occupant is not current on her
rent.

He takes a slimy step towards her. She steps away.

NICOLE
Fran, please just gimme a minute.
Get out. I have the rent. I will
bring it down to you. Just let me
shower.

FRAN
You could just bring the check down
now, use my shower. I got good
water pressure. You know that...

FRAN leans against the door frame, trying to strike a
seductive pose. NICOLE smiles and holds up her camera.

NICOLE
You're in the perfect light Fran.
(he smiles, preening)
Back up a little...little more.

FRAN steps outside and on to the landing.

INT. NICOLE'S APARTMENT FRONT DOOR -- ATLANTA -- DAY

NICOLE kicks the door shut and locks it, escaping FRAN who
calls through the door.

FRAN (O.S.)

Tricky tricky, girl. Alright, so you shower up and come down. For real. We don't gotta talk about the check. Hang out a lil bit...

NICOLE puts her camera down gently on the table.

NICOLE

(sotto)

In your fucking dreams.

She now flings her purse on the ground in frustration...the contents spill on to the carpet. Amidst the flotsam we focus on yet another candy tin that springs open. NICOLE fixes her stare at the hypodermic needle resting inside.

INT. CABIN - GALLEY - DAY

WHIP exits the lavatory drying his hands with a towel. He looks down the aisle to see TRINA far down the cabin. TRINA sees WHIP, comes back up the aisle and stands with her back to him watching the passengers.

WHIP opens a bottle of orange juice and takes a big swig. He then pours half of it in the sink. WHIP places the open juice bottle on the liquor cart, reaches up, and grabs the cabin mic to address the passengers.

WHIP

Folks, this is Captain Whitaker. If you look up, I'm here in the galley. I will wave to you.

WHIP steps into the aisle so the passengers can see him. WHIP waves with a calm smile that would put anyone at ease.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Good Morning. I apologize for the bumps, but Florida just doesn't seem to like us Georgians. Must be the beatin' the Bulldogs put on the Gators last fall.

Titters of laughter from the passengers as WHIP moves the half step he needs to put himself behind the liquor cart.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Stretch out and relax. The air might stay a little cranky so I'm gonna ask that you sit tight if you can, with your seat belts fastened.

We now watch from behind WHIP as his free hand reaches into the top drawer of the liquor cart and pulls three small vodka bottles out.

WHIP (CONT'D)

We won't have beverage service but the girls will walk through with water and snacks and I'll have you in Atlanta in about 40 minutes. Thank you.

WHIP puts the mic to its hook. Alone in the galley and out of view, he quickly empties the vodkas into the orange juice bottle and replaces the cap. Whip shakes the juice as he tosses the little empties into the galley trash. Whip takes a healthy pull from the spiked juice, downing nearly half.

WHIP knocks on the cockpit door. MARGARET emerges and WHIP disappears in to the cockpit.

INT. NICOLE'S APARTMENT -- ATLANTA -- DAY

Framed photos on a bureau show: Christmas around the tree with Mom (30) and Dad (33) and a girl who's 8 and a boy who's 5. **(In the reflection of this photo we see a flame cooking heroin in a spoon.)**

Another photo depicts an 8 year-old girl's birthday party. **(In the reflection of this photo see wee Nicole tying off.)**

A last photo shows NICOLE (30) and her mom (54). They are both wearing kerchiefs. We can see that her mom is gaunt and has no hair under her kerchief. **(In the reflection of this photo we see the needle injected into her arm.)**

A HYPODERMIC NEEDLE is placed in front of that picture. Next to the photos is a small CD station that NICOLE taps to life and turns up. The opening bars of *Michael Fitzpatrick's "Medication"* begin to play.

We pull wide to see NICOLE pull the bra from her arm that she used to tie off with. Her face is pure happiness.

Clothes and a peach crate filled with camera equipment join a suitcase on its side that acts as a coffee table. NICOLE picks up her camera and admires it before putting it down.

She picks up the cigarette she had staged pre dope fix and reaches for the lighter. She laughs and hums, pulls out gum, a brush...She's holding the brush when the first heavy wave of narcotic death washes over her. She leans back and uses the wall for support. **"Medication"** is hitting its chorus...

NICOLE

Oh man...

She puts her arms out at her sides, euphoria. A slow, sloppy smile breaks across her face. She exhales slowly. She reaches for the now burning cigarette when the second wave of heavy drugs hits. NICOLE looks up with fear.

NICOLE (cont'd) (CONT'D)

Oh no, oh no, oh no...

She reaches for the little bag of coke that KIP gave her. Next she grabs her phone, flipping it open. As she tries to dial it, she crumbles to her knees. NICOLE somewhat controls her fall to the ground, but her eyes are fading. The little bag of coke falls from her fingers.

There's no way to stem the tide of the oncoming overdose. NICOLE's arms stretch out in a frozen reach as her body sinks to the floor. On her back like a girl making angels in the snow as her eyelids flutter, she slips away.

We hear a pounding on the door. FRAN is on the other side...

FRAN (O.S.)

Open up, Nicole! I can smell that
shit cooking! Open Up! Nicole.
Nicole!

INT. COCKPIT - DAY

WHIP is now passed out in the seat next to EVANS. He has two approach plates (charts) folded and tucked between his sunglasses and eyes, creating a makeshift sleeping mask. His lower jaw hangs open as his head bobs in deep sleep.

Margaret leans in through the cockpit door talking to Evans.

MARGARET

How long has Sleeping Beauty been
out?

EVANS maintains a military posture as he monitors the plane's progress. The flight is smooth and the sky appears clear.

EVANS

(looks at his watch)
26 minutes. We're going to start
descending any second now.

MARGARET

Well, I guess you'll need to
wake...

The radio interrupts...

ATC
SouthJet 227, Atlanta Center.
Descend and maintain Flight Level
30 thousand.

EVANS
Descend and maintain 30 thousand.

Evans dials 30,000 into the auto-pilot, but just as he rolls the thumb switch to the "Descend" position...

BANG! THE PLANE SUDDENLY PITCHES SIDEWAYS

Instantly the autopilot's Shut-Off SOUNDS.

WHIP jolts awake and pushes up his sleeping "shades."

WHIP
The fuck was that?

Evans grabs his yoke and pulls.

EVANS
The stabilizer feels really stiff.

WHIP
Don't force it.

EVANS does, we HEAR a big mechanical SNAP.

MARGARET
(referring to the noise)
That came from the back!

EVANS
I have very little trim control
sir.

WHIP
Margaret, get everybody strapped in
tight.

Margaret runs to the PA, leaving the cockpit door open.

EVANS
It's pulling right. Hard!

WHIP
Shit! It's locked up, ease up on
the trim don't...

BANG! THE PLANE PITCHES DOWN VIOLENTLY AND BEGINS A NOSE DIVE.

EVANS

(panic)

I have no trim at all!

The instrument panel LIGHTS UP like a Christmas tree -- A WARNING HORN BLARES.

WHIP

We lost our hydraulics!

WHIP pulls on his headset and keys his mic.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Center, this is SouthJet 227, we've lost our hydraulics...and, ah shit!

(to Evans)

Power. Pull back the power!

Evans pulls the throttles to idle.

WHIP (CONT'D)

(into his mic)

...we lost hydraulics and looks like...also our horizontal stabilizer.

ATC

SouthJet 227, Atlanta Center. Understand you've lost hydraulics and stabilizer?

WHIP

(to Evans)

Turn on the back-up pumps!

Evans engages the emergency hydraulic pumps.

WHIP (CONT'D)

(into mic)

Center, that's affirm. We are in a descent, an uncontrolled...

WHOOOAAAAA!!!!

The plane starts to bank to the right, WHIP puts his hand against the wing-window to stay in his seat. EVANS grabs his harness with both hands. The passengers shriek with terror.

ATC

SouthJet 227, do you wish to declare an emergency!?

MARGARET stumbles into the cockpit.

MARGARET
Everyone's belted in. Are we going
down?

The plane suddenly pitches up, begins to roll, and dives
again.

WHIP
Get belted in, everyone belt in.
Brace position!

MARGARET rushes to the bench in the galley.

Whip grabs his yoke and pulls. The plane inches up.

WHIP (CONT'D)
I've got some control on my side!
My plane!

EVANS
Your plane.

Whips keeps back pressure on his yoke.

EVANS (CONT'D)
It's stiff as hell. We're pitching
up. Slowing a bit.

ATC
SouthJet 227, say your condition.

Whip continues to give orders to Evans.

WHIP
We need drag. Throw out everything
we've got. Speed brakes. Gear...
(keys his mic)
Uh, Center we're in a dive...lost
vertical control.

ATC
SouthJet 227, Roger.

Evans deploys the landing gear and applies the speed brakes.

The wind ROARS as the gear doors drop. The airframe shakes
and rumbles violently.

WHIP
(to Evans)
...there enough hydraulics to drop
the gear?

EVANS

Gear's down. I don't think hydraulics is the problem.

WHIP

Throw out the flaps.

EVANS

Too fast for flaps.

WHIP

We need to start dumping fuel.

Evans hesitates.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Do it!

Evans quickly throws the "EMRG FUEL DUMP" switch.

The airplane bucks and drops violently -- A chorus of terrified SCREAMS ERUPTS from the main cabin.

Whip pulls on his yoke with all of his strength and the dive shallows out a bit.

ATC

(on radio)

SouthJet 227, Atlanta Center. How do you hear?

WHIP

(keys his mic)

Atlanta. This is SouthJet 227. We are in an uncontrolled dive, descending out of...shit I don't know...

EVANS

(calls to Whip)

21 thousand!

WHIP

(into his mic)

...21 thousand. We are declaring an emergency! We are dumping fuel! We have a jammed stabilizer...or something. We need a block of altitude to work the problem...and a heading to the nearest airport!

(YELLS to Evans)

I'm starting to lose it!

The yoke pressure pulls Whip hard against his harness.

ATC

SouthJet 227. Hartsfield-Jackson International is 10 O'clock and 20 miles from your present position. Maintain block altitude, Flight Level 10 thousand through Flight Level 20 thousand. Turn left heading 260.

WHIP

(keys mic)

260...we'll do our best.

(to Evans)

It's getting away from me! I can't hold...dump the flaps!

EVANS

We're still fast.

The yoke is ripping away from Whip's hands.

WHIP

DO IT! 30 percent!

Evans dumps in the flaps. The JR-88 slows dramatically and balloons up.

WHIP (CONT'D)

That bought us a little time. We need to revert to manual control. Your side first, pul...

Whip is interrupted by the radio.

ATC

(on radio)

SouthJet 227, Atlanta. Fuel dump is approved.

WHIP

(keys mic)

Thank you.

Evans is confused and panicked, he throws his hands up.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Evans, look at me! Manual Reversion. Red lever, on the floor, far side of the console.

Evans sees it.

EVANS

I got it.

WHIP

Pull it up, turn it clockwise, push
it back down.

Evans does exactly that, then pulls back on his yoke --
nothing!

EVANS

Nothing! No control!

WHIP

Goddamn it!!

Once again, the plane pitches into a dive. Whip strains to
hold on.

WHIP (CONT'D)

I can't let go! Can you reach mine?

Evans strains to reach Whip's Reversion Pull-Handle -- but
can't.

EVANS

I can't reach it.

Evans moves to release his harness, but Whip stops him.

WHIP

No! Don't! Stay strapped in!
(calls over his shoulder)
Margaret! Margaret!

Margaret tumbles into the cockpit, catching herself on Whip's
chair. She's crying.

MARGARET

Oh God, Whip. What's happening?!

WHIP

Get strapped into the jump-seat. I
need your help.

Margaret opens the jump-seat and starts to pull on her
harness. Throughout the scene she is struggling with her
harness.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Margaret, see that red lever on the
floor next to my chair? The one
that says, Manual Control?

MARGARET

Yes.

WHIP

On the count of three you pull it up, turn it clockwise, then push it back down. OK? You ready?

With tears streaming down her cheeks, she gives Whip a brave nod.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Here we go. One, two...

Whip releases back pressure from his yoke, pushing it forward -- the plane noses downward 20 degrees!

WHIP (CONT'D)

...three!

MORE TERRIFIED SHRIEKS come from the back. Margaret quickly disengages then re-engages the large red handle.

Whip pulls back on his yoke. The plane pitches up.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Ok. OK. We got something. It's still stiff as hell. Evans, put in some power!

Evans pushes up the throttles. Whip gingerly applies pressure to his stick. His face fills with worry.

WHIP (CONT'D)

I don't know. It feels like the son of a bitch wants to nose over.

Then suddenly... WHAP! Whip's yoke flies out of his hands and SLAMS forward!

The plane banks right and drops! Margaret SCREAMS!

WHIP (CONT'D)

SHIT! POWER BACK!

(he pulls back the power)

I CAN'T FUCKING BELIEVE THIS!

EVANS

OH NO!

Now, ATC comes on the radio...

ATC

SouthJet 227, Hartsfield-Jackson is eleven o'clock and niner miles. I see you below 10,000. How are you doing?

WHIP

(keys his mic)

Not good. You got anything closer?
We're in a rapid dive here...

ATC

Roger, SouthJet 227. Uh...Clayton
County is 2 miles at your 4
o'clock.

WHIP

Negative. We're too high...we can't
pitch for glide. We have no
stabilizer control.

ATC

Copy, SouthJet 227.

The plane continues to drop, increasing its nose-down
attitude and speed.

WHIP pushes both of his feet forward, stretching his body to
get leverage as we can see him pulling on the yoke, trying to
get the plane out of the dive it's in.

Evans is starting to lose it.

EVANS

Oh Lord, we're descending at 4,700
feet per minute, out of 7,000. I
SEE NOTHING BUT HOUSES!

WHIP

OK! Here's what we're going to do!
(to Evans)

When I say, you retract the gear,
retract the flaps and trim both
ailerons. But every things gonna be
opposite, so be sure to trim down.
Margaret...

EVANS

Trim down?! What are you gonna do?!

Whip takes Margaret's hand and puts it on the throttle
levers.

WHIP

When I ask for power, push both of
these forward. Got it?

(Margaret nods)

What's your son's name?

MARGARET

Trevor.

WHIP

Say "I love you Trevor."

EVANS

You mean trim up?! Right? You want me to trim up?

MARGARET

Why?

WHIP

The black box.

MARGARET

I love you Trevor. Be a good boy. Mommy loves you.

EVANS

What are we doing?! Why would I trim down?!

WHIP

We're gonna roll it. Ready? Here we go. I've got control.

EVANS

(terrified)

WHAT! WHAT DO YOU MEAN, ROLL IT?!!

WHIP

Just a little barrel roll. Don't panic. Relax. Let it roll.

WHIP's body is fully extended as he pulls back on the yoke and turns into a steep bank.

WHIP (CONT'D)

EVANS, FLAPS!

EVANS

FLAPS UP!

WHIP

MARGARET FULL POWER! EVANS, TRIM US! GEAR UP!

The G-force of the roll presses Evans away from the console.

EVANS

I CAN'T REACH THE GEAR!

WHIP
Margaret! Can you reach it?

Margaret bends forward and pulls the lever.

WHIP (CONT'D)
WHAT'S OUR ALTITUDE?

EVANS
3,000...I think.

WHIP
Let it roll. I got it!

Whip quickly retracts the speed brakes, then PUSHES HIS YOKE FULL FORWARD! The clumsy liner does a slow, ungraceful roll.

INT. PLANE CABIN - SAME

WE WATCH as the PASSENGERS scream as the plane rolls over and they are suspended upside down.

EXT. SKY OVER ATLANTA - SAME

The JR-88 finishes its barrel-roll, skimming over suburban rooftops and trees. A CLOUD-TRAIL of Jet-A SPEWING from its wings.

As the INVERTED PLANE ROARS overhead the CAMERA PANS to find -
NICOLE

Being rushed out of her apartment on a stretcher. The TWO PARAMEDICS and Fran (the landlord) instinctively duck as the jet SCREAMS over.

FRAN
(at the sight of the jet)
Jesus Christ! What the Fuck!?

INT. FLIGHT DECK - SAME

THE PLANE IS COMPLETELY INVERTED!!

THRU THE WINDSCREEN -- THE PLANE LEVELS OFF -- IT'S INVERTED NOSE RISES TO MEET THE HORIZON.

EVANS hangs in his harness straps as dust and smoke swirl around him. The inverted wings make an EERIE WHISTLING SOUND as the plane SHUDDERS violently side-to-side.

EVANS

Oh Lord Jesus! We're inverted!

WHIP reaches over and pulls the throttles back. He suddenly seems strangely calm, comfortable with his fate...

WHIP

We're level. We can maintain altitude like this.

MAIN CABIN -- WE WATCH OVER TRINA'S SHOULDER AS SHE HANGS

TRINA struggles to stay in her seat as she looks at the passengers hanging. She watches as a YOUNG BOY loses his grip and flops to the ground.

TRINA unhooks and flops to the ground. We follow her as she runs on the ceiling of the cabin towards the BOY. She gets there and starts lifting him towards his FATHER.

COCKPIT -- SAME TIME

The ATC voice now plays loudly through the entire cockpit.

ATC

SouthJet 227, Atlanta Center. I see your position 4 and a half miles southeast of the airport. Descending out of 1,800. Are you OK?

It takes Whip a second to find the mic key on his inverted yoke...

WHIP

Uh, Atlanta...we're inverted.

There's a very pregnant pause...

ATC

Uh, SouthJet 227...say again sir. Did you say inverted?

EVANS seems calmed by WHIP'S workaday attitude about their insane tragedy. But suddenly...

WARNING LIGHTS BEGIN FLASHING!

EVANS

WE'RE LOSING OIL PRESSURE! PUMP FAILURE. BOTH ENGINES!

WE HEAR A HORRIBLE, METALLIC GRINDING SOUND as the engines become oil-deprived.

WHIP
We're flying!

WHOOOP, WHOOOP, WHOOOP! -- THE ENGINE FIRE ALARM SOUNDS!

EVANS
FIRE IN THE LEFT ENGINE!

WHIP
PUT IT OUT!

Evans pulls the Fire Bottle handle.

Whip BARKS at air traffic control.

WHIP (CONT'D)
(into his mic)
HOW FAR'S THE AIRPORT!?

ATC
227, three miles, and one o'clock.

WHIP
(into his mic)
We're not gonna make that!

WHIP'S POV -- THRU THE INVERTED WINDSCREEN --

A small white church on a hill -- 100 yards past the church is a soy bean field and a two-lane blacktop.

WHIP (CONT'D)
(into his mic)
There's a field and a road
ah...we're gonna put it down in
that field.

ATC
Roger, SouthJet 227.

BACK TO ACTION -- CLOSE ON WHIP -- HE CALMLY FIGHTS ON.

EVANS is breathing heavy as his face is beet red from the blood rushing to it.

EVANS
WE'RE LOSING THE LEFT ENGINE!

WHIP
 WE'RE COMING BACK OVER! EVANS, WHEN
 I START THE ROLL, THROW EVERYTHING
 BACK OUT!

THE NERVE-WRACKING ALARMS CONTINUE TO SOUND!

EVANS
 FIRE IN THE RIGHT!

Evans deploys the right engine Fire Bottle.

WHIP'S POV -- WE'RE HEADED TOWARD THE CHURCH --

WHIP
 (into his mic)
 WHAT'S MY ALTITUDE!?

ATC
 (on radio)
 Eight hundred, descending...

A NEW ALARM SCREAMS!

EVANS
 WE LOST THE LEFT ENGINE!

WHIP
 We have enough speed to fly!

EVANS
 WE'RE LOSING POWER IN THE RIGHT!

WHIP
 HERE WE GO!

WHIP PULLS HARD ON HIS YOKE -- THE PLANE SLIPS SIDeways AS IT
 STARTS TO RIGHT ITSELF. Whip yanks back the throttles!

WHIP (CONT'D)
 FLAPS FULL! GEAR DOWN!

Evans and Whip deploy every bit of drag they can think of.

ATC
 SouthJet 227, altitude 500
 indicated, descending. Do you
 concur?

We follow WHIP's eye line that takes us off the control panel
 and to the windshield.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD WE SEE -- the landscape and the church
 steeple getting closer and closer.

The plane does a clumsy roll to the right -- AND GETS STUCK PERFECTLY ON ITS SIDE!

WHIP
MARGARET, POWER!!!!

EVANS pushes the power to full thrust AND THE PLANE FINISHES ITS ROLL!

THE PASSENGERS HOWL!

INT. MAIN CABIN -- GALLEY -- SAME TIME

TRINA is still struggling to strap herself in to her jumpseat. The plane rolls! She sees Camelia...

P.O.V. -- Camelia is tossed across a row of SCREAMING passengers.

TRINA loses her grip and is violently thrown against the galley wall!

Like a rag doll, CAMELIA is hurled down the cabin aisle as the plane plummets!

Trina slides across the galley floor and CRACKS her head on the jumpseat.

INT. COCKPIT -- SAME TIME

Whip frantically spins the trim wheel!

THRU THE WINDSCREEN --

THE CHURCH SPIRE IS COMING RIGHT AT US -- BOOM! -- THE RIGHT WING CLIPS THE STEEPLE, SHEARING OFF THE CROSS!

WE HEAR A HORRIFIC, METALLIC GRINDING -- followed by a TERRIFYING SILENCE -- RIGHT ENGINE STOPS.

EVANS
WE LOST ALL POWER!

An unnerving quiet descends over the passenger cabin. The only SOUND is the wind RUSHING past the air-frame.

CLOSE ON WHIP --

WHIP
(to himself, incredulous)
Are we gliding?

THROUGH THE WINDSCREEN --

WE'RE DROPPING RAPIDLY TOWARD THE GROUND -- A GROUP OF PEOPLE GATHERED NEAR A POND IN THE CHURCHYARD SCATTER -- some are wearing long white robes.

CLOSE ON WHIP --

WHIP (CONT'D)
WE'RE IN A GLIDE! PITCH FOR GLIDE!

EVANS (O.S.)
Oh God.

CLOSE ON THE YOKE -- WHIP PULLS WITH ALL HIS MIGHT --

WHIP
TRIM IT!

CLOSE ON THE TRIM WHEEL -- WHIP SPINS IT "TRIM UP" --

WHIP (CONT'D)
PITCH FOR GLIDE!

THROUGH THE WINDSCREEN -- THE BEAN FIELD RUSHES UP AT US...

CLOSE ON WHIP --

WHIP (CONT'D)
BRACE! BRACE FOR IMPAC...

ALL SOUND FADES AWAY AS THE SCREEN BLEEDS HOT WHITE -- OVEREXPOSED.

IN GRAPHIC SLOW-MOTION -- THE INSTRUMENT PANEL CRUMPLES AND COLLAPSES AROUND WHIP --

And in a final, ironic, cosmic gesture --

WHIP'S CONTROL YOKE HURDLES TOWARD HIM -- IMPACTING HIM BETWEEN THE EYES --

CUT TO BLACK:

NOW WE HEAR -- SHOUTS, SCREAMS -- A WOMAN SOBBING.

FADE IN:

WHIP'S POV --

WE SEE Whip's lower torso being pulled from the wreckage -- There is swirling SMOKE AND DUST, SMALL FIRES --

40.

Evans strapped in his chair, bleeding --

Margaret SOBS uncontrollably --

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. CRASH SITE -- **SLOW MOTION** - HILLSIDE -- DAY

WHIP'S being pulled up a grassy hillside. In the distance WHIP can see the shattered airplane lying in a crater. Fires smoulder around the impact zone. Passengers are joined by first responders as they frantically carry, drag and walk the injured and the dead from the plane. WHIP sees a fire truck fly by him, down the grassy slope towards the burning plane.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

WHIP'S POV --

LOOKING UP at the sky -- WE SEE black, oily SMOKE billowing across the shattered church steeple --

WE GLIMPSE PEOPLE rushing past, some are wearing white flowing robes --

WE HEAR DISTANT SIRENS APPROACHING AND PEOPLE PRAYING --

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

A LOUD SIREN SCREAMS --

WHIP'S POV --

LOOKING UP at the ceiling of an ambulance --

TWO EMTS are urgently attending to him --

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

WHIP'S POV -- NIGHT

A halogen overhead light and an air-conditioning vent --
brown-stained acoustic ceiling tiles --

WE HEAR the rhythmic BEEP of a heart monitor --

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- NIGHT

WHIP's eyes open to see the halogen overhead lights of a
hospital room. He turns his head slightly to see the flicker
of a TV with no sound.

TELEVISION -- NEWS - NO SOUND -- GRAINY CELL PHONE FOOTAGE

A news show runs a loop of eye witness cell phone footage of
the plane turning over and crashing belly down.

A MAN who has been watching the TV turns to see that WHIP is
awake. The MAN turns off the TV, gets up and approaches
WHIP's bedside. WHIP knows him.

WHIP

Charlie Anderson.

CHARLIE ANDERSON is a late 50's former military pilot who
carries that familiar air of Texas comfort and entitlement.

CHARLIE

How you feelin' Whip? Initial
reports look like you pulled some
move up there, kid. You saved a
lot of lives.

WHIP is moved by the first realization of survival.

WHIP

How many?

CHARLIE moves close to deliver the news.

CHARLIE

102 souls on board including the
flight crew, and 96 of them
survived the crash. Six people
died. 2 crew, 4 passengers.

WHIP

4 passengers. Are the rest badly
hurt? Who'd we lose on the crew?

A NURSE enters the room. CHARLIE nods to her.

CHARLIE

Listen, protocol is the NTSB has to make the first contact with you and the agent is here. Let me go get him.

CHARLIE ducks out of the room. WHIP is alone and still getting his bearings. He goes to scratch his head and catches sight of his left hand. It's swollen and sore --his wrist is bandaged with a splint-brace. He now looks at both of his hands in wonder.

WHIP hears a muffled conversation that gets clearer as do the images of MANY PEOPLE entering the room. A POLICE OFFICER accompanies a DOCTOR and TWO NTSB AGENTS.

An NTSB AGENT holds a small voice recorder towards WHIP.

NTSB OFFICER #1

Captain William Whitaker? Nod if you can hear me and understand me.

(Whip nods)

I'm Craig Matson from the NTSB and I'm required as the lead on the Go Team to make an initial contact with you after a major incident like the one you had today.

WHIP nods as his senses are getting sharper.

NTSB OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)

You are in a hospital in South Atlanta. Are you aware that you were piloting a plane that went down?

(Whip nods)

I have a doctor here who can explain your medical situation.

WHIP offers a "thumbs up" gesture. The DOCTOR steps in.

DOCTOR

I'm Doctor Kenan and the good news is that you are in good condition. You did suffer a concussion which is the reason you have a bit of blurred vision and a headache. You have numerous lacerations around your left eye. We're going to leave the patch on for a few days as a precaution. But it seems your eye is OK. MRI's show strained tendons in your left knee and ankle but you didn't break any bones.

You have some deep bruising in your left thigh and you have a few torn ligaments in your left wrist. Nothing serious. So as soon as we clear you from the concussion, and you feel well enough -- you can go home. That could be a day, could be 3 days. Okay?

WHIP quietly nods. The DOCTOR leaves and WHIP begins to study his body. His left leg is wrapped, his left wrist has a splint-brace --

NTSB OFFICER #1

I won't ask too much of you tonight, but as I said, the NTSB is required to make initial contact. How much do you remember about the flight?

WHIP looks at the NTSB OFFICER and slowly speaks.

WHIP

I remember everything until the crash.

WHIP's voice is failing him as his throat is sore and dry.

NTSB OFFICER #1

Okay Mr. Whitaker, that's fine. I am required to inform you that this incident did result in the loss of life.

(checks an index card)

The most current information states that of the 102 souls on board we lost 6. 2 crew members and 4 passengers. 59 people were treated and released. 37 people remain in the hospital and 3 of those cases are listed as critical.

WHIP

Who on the crew died?

NTSB OFFICER #1

Two flight attendants;
(checks a note card)
Camelia Satou and Katerina Marquez

WHIP tries to exhale as the loss of TRINA sinks in.

NTSB OFFICER #1

The rep from your Pilot's Union, Mr. Anderson, will act as our contact for you. It's important to follow your Union's guidance on press and media. The pilot's union works closely with the NTSB. So, I'm gonna head out. Good luck Mr. Whitaker.

WHIP nods as the NTSB OFFICER leaves with the police and other officials in tow. CHARLIE returns to WHIP's side.

WHIP

I knew Trina Marquez. We spent some time together.

CHARLIE

Apparently she wasn't strapped in. A survivor reported that she was assisting a kid.

CHARLIE tries to put a reassuring hand on WHIP's shoulder.

WHIP

How's Margaret Thomason?

CHARLIE

(checks his notes)

Broken collar bone, cuts, banged up, but she's okay. She's here too. Ken Evans your copilot took a bad shot to the head. They're keepin' him in a coma to let the brain swelling go down. He's listed as critical, but we feel good about him. He's gonna be okay.

WHIP lets that information land as his head is swirling.

WHIP

Charlie, why are you here?

CHARLIE

I'm flying a desk now. I'm a regional rep for the IAP.

WHIP

You're the rep for the pilots' union?

CHARLIE

I'm one of a few union reps for the southeast. When your plane went down all the reps got a page and since I know you I shot my hand up and said I wanted to come and be the first face you'd see.

WHIP

I'm glad it's you.

WHIP starts to weep as he needs to begin the long process of expressing this trauma.

CHARLIE

It's good to see you too, Cowboy. You're gonna be okay. We're gonna take care of you. That's my job.

WHIP nods as he wipes his eyes on his heavily bandaged hand.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

The union will put out a statement on your behalf. Condolences to the families who lost loved ones and gratitude to the brave men and women on the flight crew.

(Whip nods)

And I know you and Deana have been divorced for a while but maybe she and your son...?

WHIP

Yeah, Knuckles.

CHARLIE

Yeah, how old's he now?

WHIP

15.

CHARLIE

Wow, you weren't even married when we flew for Delta. We're dinosaurs, Whip. Do you want me to reach out to Deana and see if she and Will want to come? Any family you want here, we'll get them here, stat.

WHIP thinks about his long since fractured family...

WHIP

No, I'll call her.

CHARLIE

Speaking of which, I have your phone and some of your personal effects from the plane.

CHARLIE has a zip-locked bag with his phone, keys, sunglasses and wallet. WHIP looks at them, odd to see them encased in plastic.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Your clothes are toast. Do you need me to get you some stuff?

WHIP

No, I'm okay. I'll take care of it.

CHARLIE

I'm gonna head out, let you get some rest. I'm coming back. You'll see plenty of me.

CHARLIE hands WHIP his card.

WHIP

Thanks Charlie, I really...
(Whip begins to crack)
It means a lot to me that you came.

CHARLIE

Okay. Get some rest now.

WHIP

Charlie, that plane was fucked.

CHARLIE

I know. The way you landed that plane was nothing short of a miracle.

WHIP nods trying to pull it together. CHARLIE pats WHIP's shoulder before he leaves. WHIP sits up and pulls his phone from the plastic bag. Dials, waits...

WHIP

Harling...Harling...yeah, it's Whip. I'm in a hospital in South Atlanta...what? You know where I am? Okay well fuck...yeah, I'm okay. What? Well, I'm looking to get outta here...hopefully tomorrow. Yeah. But, listen, I need you to bring me something to wear.

I don't know -- clothes -- and
 smokes, I really need smokes. Tee
 shirt, sweat pants....Harling?
 I'll put you on the visiting list.
 Yeah...and smokes. Just be low
 key, no fucking around, Harling.
 Cigarettes. Okay? I need
 cigarettes. Yeah. Good.

WHIP closes his eyes and exhales. He now stares at the foot
 of the bed for a long, long moment. WHIP squeezes his eyes
 shut tight -- holding back tears. Then quietly, as if
 whispering a prayer...

WHIP (CONT'D)
 Goddamn it...

INT. HOSPITAL -- ELEVATOR DOORS -- MORNING

The *Stones* "Sympathy for the Devil" kicks up as we wait...

The doors split open and **HARLING MAYS** steps out. HARLING has
 a pony tail and a goatee and is probably wearing a Tommy
 Bahama button down shirt.

We follow HARLING as he strides down the hall. With ear buds
 in, HARLING points a Sanyo pistol-shaped cam corder at the
 ATTENDING NURSE at the nurses' station, recording her...

HARLING MAYS
 I'm on the list baby girl. Check
 the list for Mr. Mays. Harling.

The *Stones* continue to wail as Harling strolls on, adjusting
 the duffel bag he has slung over his shoulder.

EXT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

HARLING stands in the doorway looking in. He sees...

The **MORNING NURSE** is helping WHIP to stand. HARLING points
 his camcorder at WHIP and the NURSE.

HARLING MAYS (O.C.)
 If this is gonna turn into a sponge
 bath, I'll come back.

NURSE
 Sir-

HARLING immediately goes to WHIP and supports him.

WHIP
It's okay, Harling.

HARLING MAYS
That's right honey, I'm on the
list. Harling Mays. Some say they
Harling knew me.

HARLING boxes her out. She steps away.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)
Honey can you hustle us a couple of
daiquiris and a cocktail weenie?
On second thought just bring the
booze. I brought my own weenie.

No reaction as the NURSE collects the trash and towels.
HARLING focuses his camcorder on the NURSE and leaves WHIP in
an unsteady stance. HARLING films her and comments...

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)
She's offended, and she should be.
I'm a pig. And I hate me. That's
what we have in common Nurse
Ratched...we both hate me.

And she's gone. HARLING turns to WHIP.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)
Whip? What the fuck my man?
They're sayin', "Sweet Jesus, what
a fuckin' stud that pilot is."
You're a hero, no shit. You will
never pay for another drink in this
life time. There is crazy news
people all over, look at this shit--

HARLING helps WHIP to the window...

EXT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- PARKING LOT -- DAY

From WHIP's window we can see a slew of news vans with signal
towers as well as reporters milling about -- a small zoo.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

HARLING and WHIP stare for a moment at the circus below.
WHIP doesn't last long and slowly returns to the bed as
HARLING continues to gawk.

HARLING MAYS

Classic hero worship, you're a rock star man. You gotta see the video I've got -- I'm making a doc about you, well us, y'know?

HARLING pulls an iPad out of his knapsack and flips it open. He lets a collection of videos run...

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

This is outside your condo...

On HARLING's iPad we see footage of PRESS swarming outside WHIP's condo. We also see the crash scene footage.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

Look that's me, and that's Mark Mellon...you know that douchebag talking haircut from local Atlanta channel 3? I said a few words. Just straight talk, y'know?

WHIP's hands shake as he grabs the bed frame. HARLING takes notice and stashes the iPad...

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

You okay Captain Whitaker? Easy...

HARLING helps him get settled. We see the beads of sweat on WHIP's lip and forehead.

WHIP

The meds they're giving me are fucking me up -- I'm all shaky and dried out. I can't sleep good.

HARLING immediately picks up the small paper cup that holds WHIP's pain meds. He fishes out the two pills and stares at them. HARLING shakes his head.

HARLING MAYS

Aprazolam? That's generic Xanax and this Hydrocodone is generic Vicodin. It's shit, prollly Canadian.

HARLING casually tosses the pills down his gullet and expertly swallows them without water. He grabs WHIP's medical chart and scours it as he prattles on...

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

We want the premium stuff. Blue label...not the fucking well shit. Where's the dihydromorphinone?

Or just some fucking Palladone
 would suffice. What is this?
 Fucking amateur hour over here?
 Get that goddamned doctor in here.
 You just saved a 100 people from
 death, they should get your fuckin'
 meds right.

(calls to the door)

YO! ROOM SERVICE!

WHIP

Listen Harling, leave it alone.

(Harling chills)

So you got my message and decided
 not to call me back? Did you bring
 me smokes?

HARLING MAYS

I decided to come by instead. And
 yes I got your fucking message and
 yes I brought you smokes.

HARLING hands WHIP a pack of smokes from his pocket. He also
 pulls out a carton of smokes from his backpack.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

Here is a fresh carton, enjoy. You
 fucking earned it -- you smoke your
 nuts off, champion. If I were you
 I'd fire up right here in the God
 damn room. Fuck'em, you're
 immortal, you're a fucking God man.

WHIP

Harling...

WHIP motions with his hands to "calm down."

HARLING MAYS

Sorry Whip. It's just...this is
 big time, man. You're a hero in a
 time when we really need heroes.

WHIP

Shut the fuck up, Harling...Six
 people died.

HARLING MAYS

96 people lived! When are you
 gonna take yes for an answer? Pick
 up the phone, man. Fuck.

HARLING pulls something from his vest pocket and puts it in
 WHIP'S hand. WHIP looks at it and back at HARLING.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)
 Here's a pint of Smirnoff and a few
 Red Bulls. You know what I'm
 sayin'? I know my customer.

HARLING continues to pull items from the bag.

WHIP
 Harling, take the vodka with you.

HARLING freezes his frenzied energy with this odd command.

HARLING MAYS
 What?! Take the vodka? Dude, are
 you insane? I'm gonna just tuck it
 in the bottom of your-

WHIP
 Take the fucking vodka!

HARLING hears him this time and raises his hand and nods,
 putting the VODKA back in his own duffel. HARLING tosses a
 tee shirt, sweat pants and flip-flops on the bed, then...

HARLING MAYS
 Okay man. Check it out.

HARLING holds up a silk Japanese Happi Coat, with elaborate
 stitching depicting colorful birds flying around Mt. Fuji.

WHIP
 Look, I'm tired man.

HARLING MAYS
 I'm out. You rest up.

WHIP
 You gotta come and get me,
 tomorrow.

WHIP pulls his keys from the bag that CHARLIE gave him.

WHIP (CONT'D)
 Here are my keys. Go to the condo
 and bring me some nice clothes I
 can wear, my phone charger and grab
 the veal outta my fridge. It's
 marked.

HARLING MAYS
 The veal?

WHIP

Yeah, the veal that's in my freezer.

HARLING MAYS

Done and done. What time you need me here?

WHIP

Tomorrow. I'll call you.

HARLING MAYS

Send the mayday and you're outta here in 7 minutes.

(a smile)

I got you a few stroke mags too. I've been in hospitals. I know what you need. JUGS, HOT MILFS in heat. ASSMASTERS. You should just stroke it all day. You're a hero -- know what I'm saying? If I was in here I'd be jerkin' it all day long. See, there's a smile.

HARLING puts his hand on WHIP's forehead in an attempt to reassure him. A quiet moment before HARLING slips out.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- 11 PM -- SAME EVENING

WHIP wakes up in a cold sweat. He is breathing heavy as he scans the room. LIGHTENING FLASHES from outside the window. Thunder RUMBLES.

WHIP looks to the night stand where we see a pack of nicotine gum has been chewed through. WHIP uses his hands to get to the edge of the bed. He roots through the duffle bag that HARLING left and finds a pack of smokes and a Bic lighter still in its package.

Determined to smoke, WHIP eyes a WHEEL CHAIR that has been placed next to his bed. Leaning against the wheelchair is a medical cane.

INT. HOSPITAL -- QUIET HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Wearing his Happi Coat (or robe), WHIP limps in to the empty hallway with the use of his cane. He checks the quiet corridor as he begins his quest...

INT. HOSPITAL -- FIRE DOOR -- 11:38 PM

The door swings open, and no one appears to be on the other side. Now WHIP fights to push the heavy door open again to slip through. A hand grabs the door and holds it. WHIP walks into the sanctity of the stairwell.

INT. HOSPITAL STAIRWELL -- SAME TIME

We find the owner of the helping hand was NICOLE who returns to a quiet spot along the wall of the stairwell as she demurely smokes a cigarette.

WHIP

Thank you.

WHIP leans his cane against the wall and carefully pulls a pack of smokes from his pocket.

WHIP (CONT'D)

I didn't think anyone would have the same devious thought about using the fire stairs to have a smoke...

NICOLE smiles and looks down, awkward around men when she is not loaded. She drops her cigarette which we see was barely smoked as she maneuvers to leave.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Don't go. I'll be quiet.

He offers her a cigarette, she takes it.

WHIP (CONT'D)

We don't have to talk. Be nice to just smoke with someone.

And they do. They sit in silence as the stairwell fills up with smoke. After a long beat...

NICOLE

Were you on the plane?

WHIP studies her, she's beautiful in an exhausted way...

WHIP

Yeah, I was. Were you?

Nicole shakes her head.

NICOLE

Where were you sitting?

WHIP

Up near the front.

Again it falls silent as we let them smoke and think in the sanctity of the fire stairs.

A VOICE breaks their silence.

VOICE (O.S.)

Tobacco's but an Indian weed,
Grows green in the morn, cut down
at eve; It shows our decay, We are
but clay;...I love the smell of
Nicotina in the morning. Smells
like...victory.

We hear a metallic rattle and WHIP and NICOLE look to the stairs.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Don't flee dear comrades! Really,
wait for me, please.

A **GAUNT YOUNG MAN** makes his way to their landing. He is dressed in a hospital gown and carrying an I.V. pole on which hangs a small bag of clear liquid. The man's hair has completely left him. His skin is gray. Eyes hollowed from his battle with cancer.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN

Can I bum a smoke?

WHIP offers him a cigarette. He takes it and fires it up with a lighter he keeps stowed in the pocket of his gown.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

I should quit, my cancer might get
cancer.

(silence)

Joke. You guys in the plane crash?

NICOLE

He was.

WHIP looks at the ground as the GAUNT YOUNG MAN studies him.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN

(it hits him)

You're the fucking pilot.

Nicole gives Whip a look.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
 I saw you on TV. Holy shit, man.
 Tough deal, but you walked away or
 it looks like you limped away.

WHIP
 Yeah, I'm lucky. Goin' home
 tomorrow.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN
 Home. Home for me is the basement,
 they keep cancer treatment in the
 basement. I'm livin' here.

WHIP
 You're living here?

GAUNT YOUNG MAN
 No. I'm dying here.

WHIP
 What kind of cancer?

GAUNT YOUNG MAN
 Fibro-mixzoid sarcoma, soft tissue
 sarcoma. Very rare, God chose me.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN laughs.

WHIP
 God chose you? You believe in God?

GAUNT YOUNG MAN
 Fuck yeah bitch. You're a stupid
 fucker if you don't believe in God.

The GOD topic has silenced the stairwell...

GAUNT YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
 As soon as you realize that the
 random events in your life are
 God...you will live a much better
 life. You spend your life
 believing that you have all the
 control over what happens.
 Bullshit. The plane you're flying
 goes down? Out of your control.
 God gives you cancer. I have no
 control over that. Did God give me
 cancer? You bet your ass God gave
 me cancer. You think if I begged
 for cancer God would have given it
 to me?

No...because I assure you I have begged for God to take it away - and guess what? I have no control over that.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN smokes the cig to the nub and rubs the remains against the smooth concrete wall.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

Can I get another smoke? What's wrong with you honey? You're beautiful, do you know that? Do I scare you? People either have to pretend they don't see me or they're drawn to me. It's funny because people see me as being close to the other side -- they feel like I have power or wisdom. They think I have the answers. Who knows? Maybe I do. Death gives you perspective. I lived my life so indecisive, in a haze. But now that I'm dying everything is so clear. It all makes sense somehow. I'm sorry but I can't get over how beautiful you are? Look at your arm, you an addict?

NICOLE looks at him. She nods.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

What's your name?

NICOLE

Nicole.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN

What do you do in the world Nicole?

She laughs, what a question.

NICOLE

Not much. I was a photographer and then I was a masseuse and I wash hair at a salon sometimes.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN

Where is it? I'll come by, I'm easy, you can wash my head.

(she smiles)

Do you think you're gonna die?

NICOLE laughs to keep from weeping.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
 You're not. You're not gonna die.

The men watch as NICOLE quietly cries, it's powerful.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
 Don't you love her?

WHIP
 I don't know her.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN
 Bullshit, I do. Random act of God?
 Don't think so. Survive a plane
 crash to meet a gorgeous girl in a
 stairwell. Fuck you man.
 (he reflects, then...)
 I'm sure they're looking for me.
 My family just showed up from Utah.
 You know it's bad when they start
 flying in. Every morning is
 special now, I'm so grateful. It's
 a trip, wish I could bottle this
 feeling I have...about how
 beautiful every breath of life is..

GAUNT YOUNG MAN starts laughing. WHIP joins him.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
 Can I get a smoke for the road?

WHIP
 Here's a pack.

GAUNT YOUNG MAN
 Thank you, I'll pass them out in
 the cancer ward. Take care Nicole,
 you're gonna be okay.

The GAUNT YOUNG MAN leaves, clanging away with his I.V. pole.

NICOLE wipes away her tears, we see her hospital bracelet as well as her track marks.

NICOLE
 Chemo brain. Chemo makes you
 pretty foggy.

WHIP
 Yeah?

NICOLE

They call it chemo brain, my mom used to slur her words and get all chatty.

WHIP

Your mom had cancer.

NICOLE

Breast cancer, she was only 54.

It's quiet.

WHIP

But why'd that guy ask you if you were gonna die?

NICOLE

I dunno. I flat-lined twice in the ambulance. Heroin addicts who use needles tend to die. Especially women for some reason.

WHIP

Is that right?

NICOLE

I have a pamphlet to prove it. A girl from AA just came to see me --
 (it's quiet)
 That guy was a trip. He made it feel like, I dunno...we were the last people left on the planet..
 (drops her smoke)
 ...and together we should save the world.

NICOLE steps on her cigarette and puts the nub in her pocket. She begins to leave. WHIP stops her.

WHIP

Well, where should we live? If we're gonna save the world, where should we do that?

NICOLE laughs.

WHIP (CONT'D)

What?

NICOLE

You don't want me.

WHIP laughs.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

What?

WHIP

You don't want me either.

NICOLE's laugh tapers off as she senses his honesty.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Where do you live?

NICOLE

Why you wanna come visit? It's luxurious.

(silence between them)

I live in Bankhead, it's south Atlanta, near the bus station.

WHIP

The luxurious bus station?

NICOLE

Yeah.

WHIP

I'll come visit you.

NICOLE

You're sweet.

WHIP

I will. What's your address?

She measures him.

NICOLE

I live at the Georgian Gardens on Taylor street.

WHIP

Georgian Gardens?

NICOLE

Yeah.

WHIP

How long are you staying here?

NICOLE

Trying to stay as long as I can but I don't have insurance to cover rehab. I'll prolly be out tomorrow.

WHIP
Oh. Okay. And you're a masseuse?

NICOLE
Yeah.

WHIP
What kind of masseuse?

NICOLE
I've been every kind of masseuse
there is.

There is strong tension between them. An orderly busts through the down the stairs. This breaks their stare.

WHIP
Good luck Nicole.

NICOLE
You too.

WHIP leaves NICOLE where he found her.

EXT. ST. FRANCIS REGIONAL MEDICAL HOSPITAL-LOADING DOCK-DAY

WHIP is wheeled out of a service exit by an ORDERLY who also holds the duffle bag of WHIP's stuff around his neck. Whip no longer wears the eye patch but has a butterfly bandage over his left eye brow.

HARLING jumps out of his 2001 Cadillac STS and immediately takes over, grabbing the duffel bag.

WHIP
Thanks Mike.

The ORDERLY tries to hand WHIP a medical file. HARLING snatches it.

HARLING MAYS
Yeah, thanks Mike.
(Harling tips him)
Here's 20 American.

ORDERLY MIKE
Thanks. Good luck, sir.

HARLING hugs WHIP who hangs on tight. The ORDERLY spins the chair around and heads back inside.

HARLING uses his key fob to remotely pop the trunk and stow Whip's duffel.

HARLING MAYS

This is how they get the Stones out of Madison Square Garden, man. 4 smoked black limos fly outta the VIP driveway and the fans jump on the limos...mayhem. Those limos? Empty. Meanwhile, Mick and the boys go out the service exit into delivery vans -- casual, rock star type shit.

HARLING helps him into the front seat and they pull away.

The Stones, "Gimme Shelter" starts to play...

53 As they drive off, we see media mayhem collected in front of the hospital. Trucks with towers, cameramen, stringers and newscasters add to catering trucks and coffee stands as the vultures wait for the carrion of sound bytes and footage of survivors.

INT. HARLING'S CADDY -- DAY

Whip watches through the rear window -- the "Media Circus" disappears as the Caddy rounds a corner. The back seat is piled with Whip's clothes, most of them still on hangers.

HARLING lights a cigarette and hands one to WHIP who takes it.

HARLING MAYS

I couldn't find any suitcases so I just put your shit in grocery bags.

HARLING pulls a cold Becks from a cooler on the floor of the back seat and uses a bottle opener that's been screwed to the dash of his car next to the radio to open the beer. He offers the beer to WHIP who waves it off. HARLING gladly keeps it for himself... "Gimme Shelter" continues to play...

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

So you're stayin' with me down on University, right? It's nice. A lotta young people...good vibe.

Harling tosses Whip a freezer bag marked:"VEAL" -- Whip begins to open it.

WHIP

No. I'm gonna go to the farm.

HARLING MAYS

The fucking farm?

WHIP

My dad's place. I can't stay at my
condo.

HARLING MAYS

I thought you sold that fucking
place.

WHIP

Not yet.

HARLING MAYS

I'm not sure I wanna stay at the
farm.

WHIP

You're not. Just take me to the
airport to get my car.

Whip finishes opening the freezer bag -- it's full of cash.

HARLING starts to laugh...

HARLING MAYS

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Veal? Really? Don't you know the
first place every two-bit thief
looks is in the freezer?

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EXT. ATLANTA RURAL SUBURBAN ROAD - WHIP'S FARM - DAY

WHIP'S BUICK turns off the blacktop past a small weathered
billboard: WHITAKER CROP DUSTING. Also a real estate "FOR
SALE" sign is posted in front.

EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- DRIVEWAY -- DAY

Whip pulls into a long, dirt driveway that approaches a one-
story farm house. He gets out of the car. With his cane in
one hand, he uses his free hand to toss the grocery bags
close to the steps and heads inside.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- LIVING ROOM - DAY

WHIP ambles in and we see the interior of the house bears the
fading patina of a proud American Family. We see PHOTOS --
WHIP in his NAVAL FLYER UNIFORM. A GROUP MILITARY PHOTO -- a
SQUADRON of NAVAL FLIERS on a carrier. WHIP'S PARENTS next
to the farm house. WHIP'S FATHER stands next to WHIP who is
holding his infant son.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- LIVING ROOM -- DESK AREA - DAY

WHIP empties his pockets onto the desk top. His keys, wallet and his cell phone are placed next to an old rotary phone attached to an old answering machine. WHIP plugs in his cell phone charge, dials in for his messages and puts it in "speaker mode" as we hear...

CELL PHONE

You have 127 messages.

(a beep)

Message one..."Captain Whitaker, this is Jim Court I'm with CNN. We'd like to schedule an interview..."

(he deletes that message)

Message two..."This is NBC affiliate KGAT in Athens we're looking to contact William J. Whitaker for..."

(he deletes and moves on)

Message three..."Captain Whitaker, this is Karen James, media relations with the pilots' union..."

WHIP again deletes the message and decides to just shut the phone down. He continues to empty his pockets. In his jacket pocket he finds a prescription bottle of pain pills.

WHIP holds it up, opens it and pours a few out in his hand.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

WHIP pours the pain pills into the toilet. He then opens the medicine cabinet and starts to empty all of the bottles into the toilet.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

WHIP goes to the collection of liquor bottles next to the sink that act as a makeshift bar. He picks up a bottle of vodka. He unscrews the cap and sniffs the contents. He slowly tips the bottle and pours it into the sink.

Whip opens the refrigerator and removes an assortment of beers. He pops them open and pours them in the sink. The faucet running to offset the pungent smell.

INT. BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Whip opens a dresser drawer and finds a couple of zip-lock bags of "bud" hidden under the socks.

INT. BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Whip dumps the weed into the toilet and FLUSHES it.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

A cigarette dangles from WHIP's mouth as he ferrets around the room, showing the focus and determination of a serial killer cleaning his kill site. He finds rolling papers, roaches, more liquor and weed -- he reaches into the Shell Bag that's hanging next to the shotgun rack and finds another "pint."

INT. KITCHEN -- LATER

Whip opens the freezer to put in his frozen dinner and his "packet of veal" and finds another fifth of vodka.

He pours the vodka in the sink and tosses the bottle into the trash -- which is piled high with empties.

Through the kitchen window, Whip sees the farm's old weathered barn. Whip furrows his brow.

EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- BARN -- DAY

WHIP slides open the heavy barn doors to reveal -- A VINTAGE CESSNA 172 -- covered in dust and bird shit from the years of stagnant storage.

WHIP lights a smoke as he marvels at the little piece of aviation history resting in his barn.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- BARN -- AIRPLANE -- DAY

Whip walks past the plane and starts to examine the large, two-story, open-ceilinged barn that is junked full of farm equipment and old furniture. He finds...

A WALL OF PHOTOS -- WHIP WITH HIS FATHER NEXT TO A PLANE. HIS GRANDFATHER, FATHER and WHIP pose next to the barn.

A CROP DUSTER acts as the background for a picture with a 15 year old WHIP and his father next to a small plane.

A series of pictures feature the PLANE in flight and SHOTS TAKEN FROM THE PLANE, aerials of the farm, etc.

WHIP holds the framed shot of he and his dad as he walks back to the plane, resting his arm on the wing.

WHIP pulls himself from the wall of photos and stares at his stuff. We recognize what must be the stuff he took from his house after his divorce. We see bikes, weights and fishing gear.

Whip rummages through a box of things packed from his home office. Trophies, sports memorabilia, citations -- A PHOTO OF HE AND HIS WIFE from happier times. THEIR WEDDING PHOTO.

Now Whip comes upon A FRAMED BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO of he and Charlie in their younger, Navy days -- wearing flight suits and standing on a carrier flight deck in front of an F-14 Tomcat. Big smiles, full of hotshot pilot swagger.

WHIP puts the photo back and spots his golf bag. He roots out a pint of cheap vodka from the inner pocket.

Next he finds a fifth of bourbon in his bicycle saddle bag.

He goes to the workbench and removes a couple of bottles from the paint shelf.

EXT. BARN -- DAY

63 Whip dumps out the liquor onto the grass as he hobbles back 63 to the house.

EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- NIGHT

65 WHIP uses just his cane now as he drags a garbage bag full of 65 empty liquor bottles to his garbage cans. He tosses the bag of empties in a can. His work done, WHIP lights a smoke and stares at the empty fields that run forever as does the landscape of his mind. He quietly tries to grasp the horror he endured and the reality of his survival.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE -- LATER THAT NIGHT

We hear the microwave beep and WHIP retrieves a frozen dinner.

INT. WHITAKER FARM--LIVING ROOM DESK AREA--MOMENTS LATER

WHIP sits at the coffee table eating his frozen dinner while watching news coverage of the crash.

PHONE RINGS

WHIP is startled by the phone that never rings. He snaps off the TV using the remote.

WHIP is in no hurry to answer the phone as the old time ring continues. WHIP goes to the desk where the phone rests and he watches the old answering machine click on. We hear...

WHIP'S FATHER'S VOICE

You've reached the Whitaker Crop Dusting Company, flying lessons and plane rides. Please leave a message and it will be returned. Thank you.

VOICE MAIL

...I think that was the beep. Hey Cowboy, it's Charlie again.

WHIP reaches for the phone but decides to just listen to CHARLIE...

CHARLIE

(speaking to voicemail)

I'm back in town and I stopped by the hospital tonight but they said you went home...so I guess you're feelin' pretty good, but um we went out to your condo and the manager said you had not returned.

INT. CARR'S OFFICE -- ATLANTA BASEBALL STADIUM -- NIGHT

CHARLIE sits at a beautiful wooden table in a modern glass-walled office above a baseball field. The table is populated with casually-dressed businessmen and lawyers as this after-hours meeting was called on the fly.

CRASH SCENE PHOTOS and FILES fill the table top. We also see a photo or two of the WHITAKER FARM.

VOICE MAIL

So...you may be with relatives, which I understand. I was really hoping to see you for breakfast. I'm at the St. Regis downtown.

There's an executive buffet on the 16th floor - 10 o'clock, okay? If you get this, please come. Some important stuff to cover. Be good.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- LIVING ROOM -- DESK AREA -- NIGHT

WHIP stands still as a beep sounds, ending the message.

INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL -- EXECUTIVE BUFFET -- MORNING

The executive buffet is a staple at the ST. REGIS. A long center table with silver trays houses eggs and breakfast meats. Fruit, bagels and a staff of servers cater to the business elite of Atlanta.

CHARLIE ANDERSON sits at a corner table with HUGH LANG, a young, well-dressed African American man. CHARLIE and HUGH are chatting in jocular spirit when WHIP approaches, walking much more confidently with his cane.

CHARLIE

Whip, hey buddy. Glad you got my message. Grab a seat.

WHIP studies HUGH as he pulls out his chair.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Whip this is Hugh Lang; he's an attorney from Chicago.

HUGH stands and shakes hands with WHIP.

HUGH

Nice to meet you Captain Whitaker.

WHIP and HUGH remain standing, both feeling a little "alpha."

CHARLIE

Siddown. Coffee?

(Whip nods, sits)

Miss, can we get some fresh coffee?

She smiles and nods. She's off to get the coffee.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

We were just talking about your copilot's wife. She told a newspaper that "God landed that plane."

WHIP
God landed the plane?

WHIP just stares at the two men who have large buffet plates surrounding them.

CHARLIE
I too believe that God landed that plane. The same way I believe that God should hit the buffet, the turkey sausage is excellent.

WHIP
I'm good with coffee.

CHARLIE
Len Caldwell was really trying to get here this morning.
(Whip seems lost)
Len is the president of the pilots' union and he wanted to be here with us and meet with you but they wanted him at the crash site. So..

WHIP is quiet, anxious to hear the purpose of the meeting.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Whip, as you know, when a plane crashes, the NTSB sends a "go team" to the crash site immediately.

WHIP
They find the flight data recorders?

CHARLIE
Yes they found them, perfectly intact.

WHIP
Great. That solves everything. The recorders will tell the story. Why do we need a lawyer from Chicago?

CHARLIE
Hugh's an attorney who specializes in criminal negligence-

WHIP
Criminal negligence?

The WAITRESS returns with the coffee. It's quiet as they wait for her to finish. She does.

HUGH

Death demands responsibility. Six dead on that plane, someone has to pay.

WHIP

The plane fell apart at 30 thousand feet.

CHARLIE

The airline will try to prove equipment failure. Which would make the manufacturer responsible. The manufacturer of the plane will try to prove poor maintenance of the equipment by the airline.

HUGH

Or pilot error.

WHIP

I had to fly that plane inverted, that means upside down, Hugh. Do you get the picture? 100 passengers hanging upside down, 500 feet off the ground. Do you have any idea what that sounds like?

HUGH

I do. I heard the black box last night.

WHIP

Are you a pilot?

HUGH LANG

No I'm not.

WHIP

Then you don't know what the fuck you're talking about.

CHARLIE

Hugh's on our team and it's the NTSB's ball game. They run the investigation and they will ultimately rule on the cause.

HUGH

They interview the entire flight crew and the passengers. They hold public hearings-

WHIP

Charlie, what do I need to know?
I'm already tired of this guy.

HUGH

The NTSB 'go team' collects blood,
skin and hair from the flight crew
for a toxicology report.

WHIP studies the two men, trying to read their poker hands.

WHIP

When did they do that?

HUGH

In the hospital. It's the first
thing they do. Do you remember
having your blood drawn on the
night of the crash?

WHIP looks at CHARLIE and then to HUGH...

WHIP

Do they have the results of these
blood tests?

HUGH

Yeah, they do.

The WAITRESS checks in.

WAITRESS

Anything else for you gentlemen?

WHIP

Did I just see warm cinnamon rolls
come out?

WAITRESS

Yes sir.

WHIP

Bring me one wouldya? Actually
bring me two, okay sweetie?

WAITRESS

Comin' up.

An awkward silence as they wait for her to clear out.

HUGH

An initial report shows alcohol in
your bloodstream at a level of .24.
In the U.S.

-- one of the most lenient drunk driving countries in the world -- you go to jail for driving with a number over .08. And by driving, I mean a car.

They all digest the information as the WAITRESS delivers the cinnamon rolls. She leaves. It's still quiet.

WHIP

What does that mean? I had a beer the night before I flew. And what...That made the tail of the plane explode?

CHARLIE

Separate issues Whip-

WHIP

I need a lawyer.

CHARLIE

Hugh is your lawyer.

WHIP

I need a bigger lawyer. A lawyer who understands that I flew a broken plane and without me at that stick there'd be 102 funerals, not 6.

HUGH

We're talking about prison not funerals. Somebody has-

WHIP

To write checks, well it's not me I promise you that. And as long as they're writing checks, write me one because someone put me in a broken plane. I'd love a check.

CHARLIE

Easy Whip-

HUGH

This tox report states that you were drunk and high on cocaine, felonies punishable by 24 years in jail. And if your intoxication is proven to have caused the death of the 4 passengers you'll get 4 counts of manslaughter. That could be life in prison.

Can I now do my job on your behalf
and kill this tox report?

WHIP is listening. CHARLIE tries to reign it in.

CHARLIE

He'll get it done, Whip. It's what
his entire life is about. Trust
me, trust him.

(Whip stares at Hugh)

Don't worry Whip, you're gonna walk
away the hero you deserve to be.

WHIP

I'm not worried, Charlie. I promise
you that. No one could have landed
that plane like I did, no one.

68

The WAITRESS returns with a coffee pot. WHIP leaves.

68

INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL -- LOUNGE -- DAY

Close on TV -- A SPLIT SCREEN -- CNN's **PIERS MORGAN** on one
side of the screen asking questions of JIM TILMON, an
aviation expert.

WE NOW SEE A PHOTO OF WHIP IN HIS SOUTHJET AIRLINE UNIFORM.

PIERS MORGAN

Captain Tilmon, we wanna play a
portion of the black box that all
of the news outlets have grabbed
hold of...

WHIP

(on television)

When I ask for power, push both of
these forward. Got it? What's your
son's name?

WIDER...WHIP STEPS UP TO THE BAR, GLANCING AROUND.

The BARTENDER steps up to serve WHIP...

BARTENDER

What'll you have?

WHIP

Can I get an orange juice?

The BARTENDER leaves to grab the orange juice.

TELEVISION -- The transcription and AUDIO of the cockpit recording continues...

MARGARET (O.S.)
Trevor.

WHIP (O.S.)
Say "I love you Trevor."

MARGARET (O.S.)
Why?

WHIP (O.S.)
The black box.

MARGARET (O.S.)
I love you Trevor. Be a good boy.
Mommy loves you.

The BARTENDER returns with the orange juice.

BARTENDER
That's it?

WHIP
And a double shot of Stoli.

The BARTENDER nods and turns in acknowledgement of the order.

PIERS MORGAN
(on television)
Wow. That audio paints a strong
picture. Captain Whitaker is
surely a hero in my opinion.

JIM TILMON
(on television)
Absolutely. However, every
incident is different. The actions
of the pilots on SouthJet 227 will
be heavily scrutinized. It's
protocol for any investigation.

The BARTENDER returns with a frosted glass and pours two
shots over the ice.

WHIP downs the vodka in a flash.

The OTHER BARTENDER has the remote and starts searching for
more coverage of the crash. He stops at a local report.

ON TELEVISION WE SEE

EXT. CRASH SITE -- DAY

A REPORTER gives a lead in at the crash site.

CRASH SITE REPORTER #1
 Kevin, it's still chaotic here at the site. Apparently a small ministry was conducting services near to where the plane came down. So the scene here is a mix of survivors and first responders, I was able to catch up with an actual passenger moments ago...

A YOUNG SHORT HAired BLONDE MAN GIVES HIS ACCOUNT

PASSENGER 1
 We were in a nose dive and people were screaming and yelling and then the plane turned upside down and we had to hold on to our seat belts to keep from falling out of our chairs -- I saw one kid fall to the floor and this flight attendant picked him up and handed him to his dad...I didn't see her again.

CRASH SITE REPORTER #1
 More details and more reports of the casualties are continuing to fly around. I can tell you that there appears to be many, many survivors. That's all I have for now. Kevin?

Another reporter has a passenger's account.

CRASH SITE REPORTER #2
 Rebecca, surviving passengers are being put in ambulances, police cruisers and even first responder vehicles and they are being taken to local hospitals for treatment. Some of the injured appear serious and it's safe to assume at this point that there are at least a few fatalities. Let's roll the tape of the passenger I caught up with earlier.

A MAN with SHORT DARK HAIR explains his experience.

PASSENGER 2

We turned like a corkscrew and all I could think was, "this is really happening, I'm going to die" and then all of a sudden the plane was upside down but steady and the pilot must have known how to fly it that way. He flipped it back over and landed it hard.

CRASH SITE REPORTER #2

Obviously a harrowing ordeal for those on the troubled plane. This is Callie J Kenner for News 5.

A third Reporter gets a FEMALE NEIGHBOR's perspective.

CRASH SITE REPORTER #3

Folks in the houses that border this field came running from their houses...

NEIGHBOR

I thought it was thunder at first. But it shook the ground hard. Thunder don't do like that. I ran outside and I could hear people yelling and I could see a small fire at first. I just took the dogs and headed down there. Then I saw the plane crumpled on the ground. I never seen nothing like that in my life.

CRASH SITE REPORTER #3

Just like that plane, this community is shattered. Folks here remain on edge as media trucks continue to line their small road and crowd the field where the plane still lies. Back to you, Tom.

EXT. CRASH SITE -- NIGHT

A news light shines on a lone reporter who stands atop a small hill above the crash field.

CRASH SITE REPORTER #4
 We're gonna take another look at
 the cell phone footage that
 captured the last moments of
 SouthJet's Flight 227.

WE SEE THE GRAINY CELL PHONE FOOTAGE OF THE PLANE

After the PLANE levels off and smacks down in the field, we
 return to REPORTER #4 in the crash field.

CRASH SITE REPORTER #4 (CONT'D)
 Many hours have passed since the
 footage you just watched but the
 crash site remains active as
 investigators work through the
 night. Using flood lights and
 miners' caps, teams continue to
 comb the crash field looking for
 the answers to the hard questions
 as to what brought down SouthJet's
 flight 227. Those answers remain
 in darkness as do the broken pieces
 of the aircraft. Hopefully
 sunlight will bring answers. For
 now this is Kent Johnson reporting.

INT./EXT. WHIP'S BUICK -- QWIK STOP LIQUOR STORE -- DAY

A 12-pack of beer hits the passenger seat as Whip climbs
 behind the wheel. Whip cracks open a "handle" (half-gallon)
 of vodka and takes a liberal pull. Whip's shoulders relax as
 the alcohol kicks in.

71 After a moment, he starts the car, shifts into gear -- downs 71
 another huge slug of vodka -- and pulls out.

INT. WHIP'S BUICK -- ATLANTA STREET -- DAY

Whip is at the wheel. A cigarette in one hand, an open beer
 in the other. He cruises slowly -- searching street signs
 with his beer-buzzed eyes.

WHIP
 (to himself)
 Taylor street, Taylor st...ah, here
 we are.

Whip rolls the Buick to a stop and scans the street.

P.O.V. THROUGH DRIVER SIDE WINDOW

WHIP spots a SIGN: "Georgian Gardens Apartments" Suddenly, NICOLE flies into frame and tosses a box into the back of her Toyota. She hustles off leaving the hatchback open.

72

WHIP raises an eyebrow, and drives toward the building.

72

EXT. THREE STORY APARTMENT BUILDING -- ATLANTA -- DAY

WHIP parks his car at a fire hydrant right in front of NICOLE's building and gets out with his cane. He pops a fresh beer and looks at the building, looking for a proper entrance. He notices Fran walking quickly along the second story balcony -- carrying a baseball bat.

Whip thinks nothing of it and begins casually poking through the stuff in Nicole's car -- a random collection of junk including clothes and photographs -- mostly of rock bands performing.

Now, WHIP HEARS an argument escalating between Fran and NICOLE.

FRAN (O.S.)

The guy in Unit 1 just told me you stayed here last night?!

NICOLE (O.S.)

Franny relax, I'm just getting my shit outta here, okay?

FRAN (O.S.)

What about the rent! YOU OWE ME MONEY!

He heads off...

EXT. THREE STORY APARTMENT BUILDING -- STAIRCASE -- DAY

WHIP does a decent job of making his way up the exterior staircase. That beer is making his leg feel a little better.

WHIP moves more aggressively up the stairs as the ARGUMENT GROWS LOUDER...

FRAN (O.S.)

Who do you think broke down this fucking door to let the paramedics in there? Huh?! -- You gotta pay for all this.

NICOLE (O.S.)
I'm sorry. Just let me get my shit
and get outta here. I will pay you
when I can.

FRAN (O.S.)
I know, just take a shower with me.
How hard is that? C'mon.

NICOLE (O.S.)
No. I'm not doin' that.

FRAN (O.S.)
If I had a bag a dope you'd be on
your knees in my shower right now,
right? Come on...

NICOLE (O.S.)
DON'T TOUCH ME!

WHIP PICKS UP THE PACE OF HIS LIMP TOWARDS THE FRACAS.

FRAN (O.S.)
Gimme the camera, for collateral.
What's it worth?

NICOLE (O.S.)
No fucking way! I will kill you if
you touch this camera! I will pay
for all of this! I will pay, okay!

WHIP crests the top of the staircase to see...

SCENE 75 COMBINED WITH SCENE 74

INT. NICOLE'S APARTMENT -- SAME

FRAN, the landlord, wielding a baseball bat as he berates
NICOLE. NICOLE has her full-bodied 35 MM camera hanging from
a strap around her neck. FRAN points the bat at her head.

Whip WHACKS Fran with his cane.

WHIP
The fuck are you doin'!?

FRAN stumbles and falls as the bat goes flying to the ground
and rolls away. WHIP licks the foaming top of his excited
beer.

FRAN
(gives Whip a puzzled
look)
Hey, don't I know you?

Whip jabs him again with his cane.

WHIP
Keep your fucking hands off her!

NICOLE who is crying, now laughs in relief. She can't believe it. "America's Hero" has just come to her rescue.

WHIP moves to comfort her..

WHIP (CONT'D)
You okay?
(she nods)
Is this all the stuff you want from
here?

NICOLE
(nods again, recovering)
Just this stuff.

She points to a camera tripod and a box of broken portfolios with photos dripping out.

WHIP
Okay, start taking that stuff down.

FRAN has gotten up and stands a safe distance from WHIP...

FRAN
She owes me 1100 bucks! Plus
damages!

WHIP
You wanna spend a thousand bucks
suing her and get jack shit? Or do
you want to make a cash deal with
me?

FRAN
Give me 700 in cash.

WHIP
You're a creep...with your baseball
bat bullshit...

Whip flings his beer at Fran's head, then pulls out his billfold.

WHIP (CONT'D)
 (sorts through his cash)
 I'll give you 400 in cash.

Whip throws the money on the floor.

FRAN sorts the options...none...he tentatively bends down and picks up the cash. Keeping a wary eye on Whip.

WHIP (CONT'D)
 Good boy. Now help her get that box in her car.

NICOLE
 Ah...my car doesn't run. It won't start. I'm taking this with me.

WHIP
 Your car doesn't run? What were you gonna do?

NICOLE
 I don't...I...I was...
 I don't know what I was gonna do.

Fran smirks. Whip drills Fran with his eyes...

WHIP
 (with deliberate malice)
 Then put the fucking box in my car.

FRAN's smirk fades. He relents and picks up the box as WHIP grabs the lighter shoulder bag and they head downstairs.

INT. WHIP'S BUICK -- DAY

NICOLE stares out the window as the city disappears.

WHIP pulls a beer from the box and offers it to Nicole.
 NICOLE smiles, thinks about it...she shakes her head, "no."

WHIP pops the top and takes a drink.

NICOLE
 What's your name?

WHIP looks to her, she to him. They begin to laugh at the absurdity. When it subsides...

WHIP
 Whip.

NICOLE nods. A long moment quietly passes.

NICOLE
Thank you, Captain Whip.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Smokey Robinson and the Miracles' "You Really Got a Hold on Me" plays as WHIP eases himself into a recliner using his cane. On the small table next to him rests his beer and an unopened bottle of bourbon with a glass of ice. WHIP cracks the seal on the bourbon bottle and pours a drink. He takes a sip and chases it with his beer.

WHIP now starts to remove the brace that we clearly see under his basketball shorts. As he takes it off he tries to massage his aching leg.

NICOLE enters the living room, fresh from a shower. WHIP studies her -- she's beautiful and innocent.

WHIP
You okay?

NICOLE
I was gonna lay down, get some rest.

WHIP
Okay.

WHIP takes another sip before returning to massaging his leg.

NICOLE
Is it really okay that I stay here?

WHIP
Yea. I want you to stay.

NICOLE walks over to WHIP and kneels down and gently takes over massaging his leg. WHIP exhales.

WHIP (CONT'D)
That feels better.

NICOLE
It's throbbing because the blood is having a hard time getting back to your heart.

78 NICOLE continues to soothe his aching leg. After a moment, 78 NICOLE stands and takes the drink out of WHIP's hand and sets it down. She now bends down and kisses him softly. She now stands and takes his hand, leading him in to the bedroom.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- WHIP'S BEDROOM -- DAY

WHIP's been awake for hours as he sits at the foot of the bed. Whip's wearing a long sleeve tee shirt and sweat pants and no shoes. He looks at NICOLE -- sleeping angelically on her side of the bed. Whip watches her sleep for a long moment, until...

80 He hears something. He gets up and goes to the window. It's a car pulling up the driveway.

INT./EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- KITCHEN DOOR -- DAY

WHIP opens the door to find HUGH in his driveway.

WHIP casts a strange figure with his bare chest, boxers and brandishing a shotgun. They stare at each other.

HUGH

Do you wanna shoot me or can I come inside?

WHIP

C'mon in. I'll shoot you inside.

HUGH walks closer to the porch. WHIP questions him.

WHIP (CONT'D)

You just decided to drop by?

HUGH

Your voice mail is full and you never answer your cell phone. I called your cell 10 times.

WHIP

I turned it off.

HUGH nods as the explanation lands.

HUGH

I thought we'd take a ride.

WHIP measures HUGH's intention...

WHIP

Okay, gimme a minute. Wait here.

82 HUGH nods and recedes from the door as WHIP goes to get dressed. 82

EXT. CRASH SITE -- OBSERVATION SCAFFOLDING -- DAY

WHIP joins HUGH on a rectangular platform on top of a two-story scaffolding frame. The platform provides a perfect view of flight 227's final resting area. We see the awesome devastation that 50 tons of metal flying at 140 miles an hour can do to a hillside.

HUGH

You can see the initial impact sheared the right wing clean off. If only the left wing had come off at impact, I think everyone would have walked off that plane.

WHIP

The left wing partially pulled away-

HUGH

It snapped but stayed connected to the airframe. So it whipped back towards the plane, hit the fuselage in front of the tail. If you were sitting in the last 6 or 7 rows on the left side, it was like being hit by a train.

WHIP

I drank a lot the night before that flight. I drank that morning too and I used coke to straighten up.

HUGH

I know, it's in the toxicology report.

WHIP

But that's not the reason this happened.

HUGH

I know.

WHIP looks at HUGH expecting him to finish his thought. HUGH holds his look for a beat before changing thoughts.

HUGH (CONT'D)

The John the Baptist Pentecostal Mission.

We hear **voices**; a low murmur that gets louder, chanting. WHIP looks to the top of the hill to see...

PENTECOSTAL MASS IN PROGRESS

A MINISTER in a dark purple cloak calls from the new testament as the CONGREGATION responds in unison.

MINISTER

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." -- Revelation 21:4

There are at least 50 people sitting in white folding chairs at the foot of the hill. A small brook babbles behind them.

WHIP continues to take in the bizarre scene.

HUGH

They helped pull survivors out of the wreckage. Now they come out here every day and have a mass 30 minutes prior to the crash. And then they sit in silent prayer for 10 minutes at 9:42...which is when you went down.

WHIP is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the crash field and the WORSHIPPERS. WHIP looks back at the crash site to see...

NTSB INVESTIGATORS

Inside the crash site, a small group of INVESTIGATORS with NTSB jackets following the lead of a CONFIDENT WOMAN. HUGH answers the question in WHIP's mind...

HUGH (CONT'D)

Ellen Block, she's the head of the investigation for the NTSB. She's the one that's gonna ask the tough questions.

WHIP

Why'd you bring me here?

HUGH

I needed you to see this.

WHIP

You trying to scare me?

HUGH

I need to know that you can handle all this.

WHIP continues to stare at the awesome dent in the earth.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Listen clearly. There was a mechanical issue with the plane, but what you and I know? Is that this was an act of God. I'm gonna fight to get the NTSB to place "act of God" on the probable causes list.

WHIP

Who's God would do this?

It's quiet before HUGH makes his case.

HUGH

So here's the deal. Avington Carr, the owner of the airline, is on our side...and he's got big friends in Washington. He wants to sit down with us. 10 O'clock tomorrow morning.

WHIP's had enough. He starts to walk away. HUGH stops him.

HUGH (CONT'D)

You can't drink. You're under the microscope. You can't be out buying liquor. No bars, no drugs.

WHIP

I'll stop. I can stop.
(Hugh stays quiet)
I told you I can stop. I won't drink.

HUGH

10 O'clock tomorrow morning with Mr. Carr, the owner of the airline.

INT. CARR'S OFFICE - ATLANTA BASEBALL STADIUM -- DAY

A huge office with a glass wall that looks out over the diamond. We are high above the outfield; if GOD was a baseball fan, this would be his office. We now meet **AVINGTON CARR**, a very righteous and self-satisfied, wealthy, southern gentlemen.

MR. CARR

I never wanted that fuckin' airline. Neither did my brother.

CARR scans the room, reading faces, holding court.

MR. CARR (CONT'D)

It was my father that wanted it. I like baseball.

Ornate, wood furniture helps to announce the political feel of MR. CARR's world. Presidential photos and commendations pepper the walls. It's quiet...

HUGH LANG

I like baseball.

Everyone looks to HUGH as it gets oddly silent... We get our first look at LEN CALDWELL, the president of the pilots' union. LEN tries to wrest some control and exude some confidence.

LEN CALDWELL

Everyone in Georgia likes baseball.

MR. CARR

Yeah...so what's the deal Lenny? Is your union gonna survive this one? More importantly? How big a check you think I'm gonna have to write?

LEN CALDWELL

There were 6 fatalities on the plane-

HUGH LANG

The 2 crew members don't get settlements like the passengers. That's a workman's comp claim, part of the union contract -- they do a dangerous job and they know it.

MR. CARR

You're the lawyer for the pilots' union?

LEN CALDWELL

No, this is Hugh Lang, the attorney we brought in to handle the criminal side of Captain Whitaker's situation.

MR. CARR

Yes, and what is Mr. Whitaker's situation? NTSB is up my ass with a flashlight. We had to give them access to everything.

(shakes his head)
 And everyone is curious about
 Captain Whitaker.

Through a glass wall we see...

WHIP SITS ON A COUCH READING A MAGAZINE IN A RECEPTION AREA.

CHARLIE
 I flew with him. He's a great
 pilot.

MR. CARR
 Is he a drunk?

CHARLIE
 He's a heavy drinker. Should I
 bring him in?

Everyone steals glances at WHIP as CARR continues to
 dominate.

MR. CARR
 In a minute. Alright, so let's get
 down to it, Lenny. What does the
 union plan to do about this blood
 test that says Whitaker was high on
 booze and coke? This guy's a real
 peach.

HUGH
 I'm gonna kill the toxicology
 report.
 (feels eyes of disbelief)
 It was done incompetently. The
 last time the toxicology equipment
 they used was calibrated was in
 June of 2009, which is 18 months
 past code. Their log that should
 clearly state who labeled the blood
 vials and when, is very incomplete.
 And they aren't sure who stored
 them. They used a preservative in
 the vials that has in some cases
 caused blood to ferment and
 register higher in an alcohol test.
 That's what I've done so far. I
 can handle this.

MR. CARR
 I like this guy Lenny. He makes me
 wanna go out and sniff a few lines
 and fly a jet.

LEN CALDWELL

Mr. Carr, we're gonna fight to push all the fault on Jackson Ridgefield, the manufacturer.

MR. CARR

Oh and you think they're gonna just open their check book and buy us all lunch? Good fucking luck. What's my exposure Jim?

CARR'S BUSINESS GUY

The awards to the families could kill the airline.

MR. CARR

Fuck the airline. The insurance companies can have the goddam airline. I just don't want them to come sniffing in my other pockets.

LEN CALDWELL

Speaking for the pilots' union? We don't want your airline to go away. We enjoy your contract with us and we will protect Captain Whitaker and in turn protect your airline.

MR. CARR

That's sweet Mr. Caldwell, but if the NTSB leaks that toxicology report showing my pilot was flying that plane drunk? We're all fucked.

CHARLIE

So far we've been lucky.

MR. CARR

Lucky?! Are you that goddammed dumb?! You think they're waiting for a light news day to splash the headline, "Drunk, coke-addled pilot crashes a plane?!"

EVERYONE goes quiet as CARR's anger commands silence.

MR. CARR (CONT'D)

My brother's in DC on his knees at the foot of the throne begging for forgiveness. And so far it's working.

They've got their boot on the neck of this girl Ellen Block runnin' the show for the NTSB and she is pissed. Can you handle that?

HUGH can't stifle a laugh. They look to him.

HUGH LANG

Trust me, I'm gonna kill the toxicology report. That's my job.

CARR looks to his lawyer who nods...

CARR'S ATTORNEY

I wish you luck, but we're still sorting out the best way to go forward legally. We might split from you and go it alone.

CARR stands to signal the end of the meeting. HUGH stands to stop him.

HUGH LANG

To go it alone? Without us? That would be what the French call "a big fucking mistake."

MR. CARR

Does Whitaker know he's going to jail?

HUGH LANG

I haven't had a client go to jail yet.

MR. CARR

He's going to jail. He belongs in jail. You bet your ass he's going to jail, the question is...is he gonna die in jail?

HUGH LANG

You're wrong, Mr. Carr.

CARR'S ATTORNEY

Last time I checked, 6 counts of manslaughter is life in prison.

MR. CARR

Life in prison, what we in Georgia call "all day long."

It goes quiet as everyone reflects on that reality.

INT. CARR'S OFFICE -- WAITING ROOM -- DAY

WHIP stands up as the meeting spills into the waiting room. Handshakes are exchanged as CARR walks to WHIP and offers his hand to shake.

MR. CARR

They tell me you're some kind of pilot.

86 CARR nods, sizing WHIP up. WHIP returns the nod as HUGH 86 quickly puts a hand on WHIP'S back and leads him away like a heavyweight being returned to his corner after pre-fight instructions.

THE TELEVISION IN WHIP'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

We are now in WHIP'S living room watching HOME MOVIES...

WHIP'S VOICE

Get up! What? You can't get up?!
(Whip is laughing...)
C'mon, Knuckles Whitaker drags himself up and goes long...go.

We watch an 8 year-old WILL WHITAKER run long as the ball flies to him. He catches it and on-screen WHIP hollers.

WHIP'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Touchdown Whitaker! Atta boy!
C'mon back. What? Come back and do it again. Tired? Junior, you don't know tired. I'm not going out. You go out. Keep running.

We pull away from the screen to find WHIP who sits on the couch. A large bottle of vodka appears empty amidst many dead beers and an ashtray that overflows.

WHIP moves in drunken slow motion as he attempts to free a cigarette from the pack and light it. He freezes at one point and places his hands straight out in front of himself, a strange, involuntary, drunken reset. His stare is a 1000 miles offshore; he is anywhere but on this planet. Oblivion.

The light from the HEADLIGHTS of a car in the driveway wash across the walls of the living room. We hear a car door open and women exchange good byes.

SHEILA (O.S.)

Keep coming back, Nicole. One day at a time.

NICOLE (O.S.)
I know, one day at a time.

87A We hear them laugh as WHIP still stares in to space. 87A

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- DOOR -- NIGHT

The door pushes open and NICOLE comes in with the Big Book of AA in her hand.

NICOLE
Hey. Sorry I'm a little late, but
we went for coffee after the
meeting...
(Whip doesn't look)
Whip?

NICOLE goes close to see WHIP look at her with a non-focused stare. She sees the table and reads the situation.

NICOLE watches as WHIP stands up. In his oblivion he tries to focus.

WHIP
Don't, don't, don't! I'll get him.
Knuckles, junior. See him. Yeah.
I'm not calling again. Fuck him.
He didn't call. Not back. Not
calling back.

NICOLE backs away as she watches the blacked-out ballet play itself out in slow, tragic fashion. WHIP motions to his lips as if he is smoking. He freezes and then steps forward and trips in to the coffee table. Whip falls to the ground.

NICOLE checks WHIP's face to see his eyes partially opened but passed out. NICOLE goes to the bedroom and returns with a blanket that she covers WHIP with. She also places a pillow under his head making sure that his head is titled to the side so he doesn't choke.

NICOLE looks around the room. She begins to collect the bottles and straighten up.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- BEDROOM -- MORNING

CLOSE ON WHIP'S FACE as he struggles with a thick hangover. He rubs his face and smacks his lips, he's dry as a bone. WHIP shakes his head as he tries to focus his look through the bedroom window. He looks out to see NICOLE sitting on a chair enjoying the landscape. WHIP rubs his head before walking to the kitchen.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

WHIP pulls open the door to the fridge and pulls out a gallon of water in a plastic jug. WHIP stands and takes a long pull of the cold water.

EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- PORCH -- MORNING

NICOLE sits with her camera staring at a candle on the table in front of her. An AA Book rests on the table. She snaps a picture of the flame and then focuses out to the grassy landing strip and the rolling hills.

WHIP enters carrying the large plastic bottle of water from the kitchen.

WHIP

Morning.

WHIP coughs and rubs his eyes.

NICOLE

Are you okay? You were in bad shape when I got home.

WHIP

Tired. Guess I drank a bit.

NICOLE

A bit?

WHIP

You wanna count the fuckin' beers? They're still in the garbage. Vodka too, is that okay with you?

NICOLE

It's more than okay, Whip.

WHIP

Good.

It's quiet as they let the awkward exchange pass.

NICOLE

I've been watching the sky change as the sun rises. Beautiful.
(holds up the camera)
Perfect light, I went out and took some great shots.

WHIP reaches for the camera. She hands it to him.

WHIP

Lemme see that camera.

NICOLE

My mom got it for me. Towards the end, when she knew she wasn't gonna recover. She maxed out her credit card to buy me that camera and a lighting kit.

NICOLE takes a moment to tamp down some emotions.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

It's just so beautiful here. Did you grow up here?

WHIP still holds the camera as he sits down.

WHIP

It was my grandfather's farm, my dad grew up here. He was a pilot in World War II, flew with the 332nd. See the landing strip out there? He built that. He ran a crop duster outta here until the EPA put an end to that.

(she nods, listening)

He traded the crop duster for a used Cessna. He flew that damn thing all over. It's still in the barn. I was gonna sell this place after my dad died. Then I got divorced...

NICOLE

And your mom?

WHIP

Dead...she's dead. Your dad still alive?

NICOLE

I'm pretty sure my father lives in Colorado.

WHIP

You got no relationship with him.

NICOLE

He drank. It was my mom that raised me. She was incredible.

NICOLE lights a cigarette as the memories are tough.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

She held it together for so long, I
couldn't tell how sick she was.
Even through chemo she looked
beautiful.

NICOLE leans over and blows out the candle.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

They gave her very heavy meds for
pain. Dilauded, morphine,
oxycontin. I started taking them
with her. We would get all
medicated and sit in our back yard
and talk and talk and watch the sun
go down. We'd be so stoned that we
couldn't get up to go inside when
it got dark.

(laughs, fights the pain)

I know it sounds crazy to get
hooked on dope with your mom, but
she was dying and we spent her last
seven months together like
teenagers, trading stories about
boys and whatever. She loved me.

WHIP lifts the camera and points it at NICOLE. She contorts
her face into a sly smile. WHIP snaps it...she laughs.

89A

A CHURCH BELL SWINGS INSIDE A STONE BELFRY

89A

The blue sky is the perfect backdrop as we reveal...

INT. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH -- DAY

WHIP in a dark suit walks amidst mourners who file out of the
church. The center of attention is a large, distraught woman
in her 60's being consoled by what appears to be her son and
his wife. The WOMAN wears a pin that holds a photo of TRINA.

WHIP stands at the bottom of the steps, watching folks,
looking for someone. Suddenly, a 9 year-old BOY stands in
front of him. The BOY locks eyes with him.

BOY

I'm Trevor. You saved my mom.

WHIP looks up to see MARGARET THOMASON walking towards him.
She has her left arm in a sling underneath her jacket. We
can see a bandage along her hairline. WHIP smiles, obviously
uncomfortable. MARGARET hugs him.

MARGARET

It's great to see you, Whip.

WHIP

You too Margaret. Broken collar bone?

MARGARET

Yeah, and some stitches but I'm fine. I really am.

(she goes quiet)

It was a nice service. I mean, look at all these people that wanted to say goodbye. She looked beautiful in there.

(Whip is blank)

Didn't you think so, Whip? Like she was gonna wake up and smile.

WHIP

I didn't go in. I couldn't.

MARGARET is sensing WHIP's struggle.

MARGARET

Trevor, find Dad. He's by Mr. Benton, there.

(Trevor leaves)

Are you okay? You should come to the counseling group. The union has great people for us to talk to.

WHIP

No. I can't, really. I will, but just not now.

It's quiet. MARGARET smiles and leans in and kisses WHIP on the cheek.

MARGARET

Take care Whip, okay?

She starts to leave...WHIP stops her with...

WHIP

Yeah...y'know...I'm in the middle of this investigation. The NTSB is investigating the crash-

MARGARET

I know. I'm going in to see them next week.

WHIP

I'm nervous because I was out the night before the crash at dinner-

MARGARET

With Trina...

WHIP

Yeah and I had two glasses of wine. And they might ask you about my condition that morning and if you thought I had anything to drink.

MARGARET appears speechless...

WHIP (CONT'D)

What?

MARGARET

I've known you 11 years and you're gonna stand here and tell me you and Trina went to dinner and you drank two glasses of wine? Sounds like a nice restaurant Whip, which one was it?

WHIP

You have to tell them it was an ordinary day. I mean it was an ordinary day. You know I was in shape to fly. You have a problem with saying that?

MARGARET

It's a lie. Whip, it's a lie. Trina told me you two hadn't been to sleep.

WHIP

My lack of sleep made the plane fall apart, huh Margaret? I'm just trying to get it straight. You think that another pilot would have been able to land that plane and save more lives?

MARGARET

I didn't say that Whip. I can't imagine another pilot doing-

WHIP

Well can you imagine Trevor at this same church looking at you in that box in there? Or my son having to come and see me in prison?

MARGARET fights tears as WHIP has struck a blow.

MARGARET

Please Whip, enough. Don't you think we've all had enough.

(Whip is quiet)

What do you want me to say?

WHIP

It was an ordinary day. The storm right after we took off was very severe, but as far as the flight crew was concerned it was a perfectly ordinary day.

The tears flow now as MARGARET can't hold them in. WHIP realizes he's gone too far. Not knowing what to do, WHIP walks away.

EXT. PEACH STREET DRUGS - AZURE BLUE SKY OF AUTUMN --
PHARMACY -- PARKING LOT - DAY

WHIP watches an airliner fly over head as he stands by his car smoking a cigarette. He wears his suit from the funeral. NICOLE approaches. She's in a great mood.

NICOLE

Are you okay? How was it?

WHIP

It was okay, okay. How're you doin'?

A beat.

NICOLE

Well, I got through my first day. They haven't fired me.

WHIP

That's good. Cause for a celebration.

NICOLE

They needed someone to work the night shift. They asked me and it's time and a half so...

She sorts through her shoulder bag...

NICOLE (CONT'D)

I gotta vest and here's my name tag. Oh oh oh....I got you something..

(hands him a nice lighter)

It's a P-51 mustang on there...

(flies her arms like wings)

You're dad flew a P-51, right?

WHIP

(stares at the lighter)

He did. So should we get some dinner?

NICOLE

I promised Sheila I would be at the meeting tonight. She's the one that's been helping me, my sponsor. Can we do it tomorrow night? And Please, Whip don't make me choose between dinner with you and the meeting.

WHIP nods, playing with the lighter.

WHIP

No, it's okay. You should go.

NICOLE

Why don't you come with me? We'll eat after. It's an open meeting.

WHIP

Open meeting?

NICOLE

That means anybody can come. Anybody.

WHIP

Even me?

She is bubbling with happy spirit; she's hot. She's hard to deny as WHIP can't help but smile at her.

INT. ST. FRANCIS CATHOLIC CHURCH -- ATLANTA -- NIGHT

A MAN stands at a podium wearing a coat and tie. He is lost in the energized retell of a story.

A.A. SPEAKER # 1

The cop is shining his flashlight on me. I'm standing there behind the dumpster, wearing nothing but my girlfriend's panties, vomit on my chest and I say to the cop...about two beers.

The room erupts with laughter. NICOLE is really taken by the candor of the speaker as she joins the room in laughter.

A.A. SPEAKER # 1 (CONT'D)

That's why they call me "Two-Beer" Barry.

BARRY makes eye contact with a STERN LOOKING OLD TIMER. BARRY holds up a loose leaf binder and addresses the man...

A.A. SPEAKER # 1 (CONT'D)

Don't worry Ed, I got the format right here. I'm sorry, Ed's giving me the stink eye. Let me get back to the format...

(reads from the format)

I'm Barry. I'm an alcoholic.

THE ASSEMBLY

(in unison)

Hi Barry.

A.A. SPEAKER # 1

Are there any other alcoholics present?

WHIP glances around to find himself in a sea of raised-handed alcoholics. A few look at WHIP with no judgement.

A.A. SPEAKER # 1 (CONT'D)

I like meetings that have us all identify. Because it makes me tell the truth about who I am. It reminds that I never ever told the truth. I lied about everything. My whole life had been a lie. And I was told that I would never get sober if I kept lying.

WHIP is very reserved, poker-faced.

A.A. SPEAKER #1

I mean, lying's what I'm good at. If I know anything in this life it's how to lie, especially about my drinking.

We pan the faces and everyone seems immediately connected. Except WHIP who leans over to NICOLE.

WHIP
 I gotta go. Okay?
 (Nicole nods)
 Can uh...
 (points to Sheila)

NICOLE
 Yeah, Sheila. She can take me back
 to work.

SHEILA
 (extends her hand)
 I'm Sheila.

WHIP shakes her hand before quickly escaping as if from a fire. We stay close on WHIP's face as he walks out. BARRY continues his pitch.

A.A. SPEAKER #1
 Like I said, I would lie about
 everything. It didn't matter what
 it was. My whole life had been a
 lie. A series of lies strung
 together by me. And when I drank?
 It was worse. What I came to
 understand was that, my lies were
 killing me. And that remains the
 great fact for me...My lies will
 kill me.

93 WHIP is gone.

93

INT. ROUND TABLE RESTAURANT -- BAR -- MINUTES LATER

WHIP enters the bar and we hear off camera a voice coming from the TV above the bar.

PIERS MORGAN (O.S.)
 The NTSB is focusing their
 investigation on the flight crew,
 specifically Captain Whitaker.

KEN EVANS (O.S.)
 Sir, I am not at liberty to discuss
 Captain Whitaker or any of the
 flight crew.

WHIP looks up to the TV.

CLOSE UP TELEVISION -- KEN EVANS IS ON TV LIVE FROM HIS HOSPITAL BED.

KEN EVANS
(on television)
And in truth, I don't have much to say about him.

PIERS MORGAN
(on a split screen)
So, safe to say that he remains a mystery.

KEN EVANS
(on television)
Sir, those are your words not mine.

WHIP exits as fast as he arrived. He's gone. PIERS MORGAN continues from the TV...

PIERS MORGAN
(on television)
I've been speaking to some people who are very close to the NTSB investigation and they are very confident that they will be able to determine exactly what brought this plane down.

KEN EVANS
(on television)
I'm sure they will sir.

PIERS MORGAN
(on television)
Thank you, Ken and Vicki Evans.

KEN EVANS
(on television)
Thank you, and God bless.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

WHIP steps off an elevator and walks down the quiet hospital hallway toward a room where a few TECHNICIANS are packing up the last bits of TV equipment.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- KEN EVANS' ROOM -- NIGHT

WHIP stands in the doorway and addresses EVANS...

WHIP
How're you feeling, Ken?

EVANS stares at WHIP with a blank look.

EVANS
Happy to be alive.

VICKI EVANS
Blessed to be alive.

WHIP
I'm Captain Whitaker, I was flying-

VICKI EVANS
I know who you are.

WHIP senses an unwelcome undercurrent. He locks eyes with EVANS trying to read him. Silence before EVANS speaks to the ATTENDING NURSE...

EVANS
Ma'am can you give us some privacy?
Thank you.
(to Whip)
Come on in sir. Shut the door.

The ATTENDING NURSE files out placing a chair next to the bed as she leaves. WHIP enters. It's again quiet.

WHIP
Listen, how long have you been...

EVANS
Outta the coma? Two days.

WHIP
I didn't mean to disrupt your whole day. I know they been swamping you with interviews. You were great on CNN...

EVANS smiles at WHIP.

EVANS
Both my legs were crushed and my pelvis snapped. I'll probably never walk again, least not without a walker or braces. I'll certainly never fly again.

WHIP
I'm sorry Ken.

EVANS

That plane was doomed the second you sat in the chair. You reeked like gin or somethin'. I called Vicki from the plane before we took off. That's when the rain kicked up.

VICKI nods, holding her cross with the chain across her lips.

WHIP

I don't know how much you remember, but the plane started to fall apart.

EVANS

I remember everything until we crashed. I know what went on.

WHIP

What are we talking about?

EVANS

I don't know Captain Whitaker, what are we talking about?

WHIP

I just wanted to get a sense from you what you thought caused the crash.

EVANS

Was it the fact that you got on the plane drunk from the night before?

WHIP goes white and drops his head.

EVANS (CONT'D)

The NTSB is coming back tomorrow to finish taking a deposition from me about the events on the flight.

WHIP

You think you'd be alive without me on that plane?

EVANS

No, we'd all be dead. But are you gonna argue that your physical state was tip top?

WHIP

I'm not gonna argue anything with you.

WHIP gets up.

EVANS

Sit, please sit.

(Whip sits)

I never shared my opinion about your physical state the morning of the flight. I've never said word.

WHIP sits and studies EVANS.

EVANS (CONT'D)

The flight was pre-ordained. I've prayed on it Captain. Vicki and I have prayed on it. There's only one judge --

VICKI EVANS

Praise Jesus.

EVANS

And he has a higher plan for you sir. This event although tragic in its loss of life is also a celebration of life.

EVANS begins to mist up with sincere inspiration.

EVANS (CONT'D)

Nothing happens in the Kingdom of the Lord by mistake.

VICKI EVANS

Praise Jesus.

EVANS

Captain, will you pray with me?

WHIP stares into EVANS' eyes and sees a believer's conviction. EVANS reaches out his hand to WHIP.

WHIP slowly moves out of his chair and kneels at the side of EVANS' bed. WHIP takes EVANS' hand and bows his head as he reaches for VICKI's at the same time. It's quiet before...

EVANS (CONT'D)

Jesus our Lord and savior we thank you for blessing Captain Whitaker with courage and wisdom. For guiding his hand on that fateful morning. In his divine light we were saved. Praise Jesus.

VICKI EVANS
Praise Jesus.

It is quiet for an extended beat. Finally...

WHIP
Praise Jesus.

97 WHIP looks at EVANS and his WIFE whose heads are bowed with 97
reverence.

EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- DRIVEWAY -- NIGHT

A small pickup truck rambles to a stop in the driveway. We hear music and laughter as NICOLE gets out.

NICOLE
Thanks for the ride guys. I'll see
you tomorrow.

COWORKER
Keep it up Nicole, you could be
employee of the year.

They all laugh; Nicole waves as they drive off. She walks towards the house which is dark. She hears music and looks towards the barn to see bright light escaping through the sagging doors and split wood walls.

EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- BARN -- NIGHT

NICOLE slowly approaches the almost glowing barn door. Her curiosity compels her to pull it open.

INT./EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- BARN -- NIGHT

The door swings open to find the plane pointed towards the driveway with an aged patina but revitalized shine. **Lenny Kravitz, "Fly Away"** blares from the stereo...

WHIP emerges from the cockpit. He's still in his suit but with his jacket off and sleeves rolled up. He's energized like an excited kid. He runs up and kisses her.

NICOLE notes the cloud of smoke hanging in the air and the burning cigarette in the ashtray, empty beers.

WHIP
Looks great right?

NICOLE
It's kind of...beautiful.

WHIP wipes at his nose.

WHIP
It's a Cessna 172, it was my dad's.
He kept it perfect.

NICOLE takes in this cool trinket of aviation history.

NICOLE
Does it work...

WHIP
Yeah, he flew this plane a few
months before he died. I learned
to fly in this plane. You can land
it anywhere.

WHIP laughs, remembering...

WHIP (CONT'D)
My friend Harling and I flew it to
Jamaica.

NICOLE
Jamaica? In this?

WHIP
We set off for an overnight fishing
trip two hours south of here. We
ended up in Bethel, Jamaica.

NICOLE
You're insane.

WHIP
It was like a picture on a post
card. The white sand and sky blue
water. Most beautiful place I've
ever been.

NICOLE
Was the water warm?

WHIP
Yeah, really warm.

NICOLE
That's my kind of place.

WHIP
Let's go.

NICOLE
Sure, why not.

NICOLE laughs thinking they're playing a game.

WHIP
Let's go tomorrow.

NICOLE
You're serious?

WHIP
We'll leave in the morning...we'll
just go. Start over.

NICOLE realizes he's serious as he opens another beer.

NICOLE
Whip, we can't.

WHIP
It's a beautiful beach, it's
paradise.

NICOLE
I'm worried about you.

WHIP
(laughs a bit lit)
I'm fine thanks.

NICOLE
No you're not, you're really not.
You need help, Whip. I think you
need rehab.

WHIP
You go to a couple of AA meetings
and all of a sudden you think
you're Jesus Christ? Worry about
yourself.

NICOLE
We're the same Whip, you and me,
we're the same-

WHIP
We're not-

NICOLE
We are-

WHIP

I didn't suck dick to get high.
And don't give me a whole...

NICOLE

Never Whip, I never in my life-

WHIP

Your mom died and dad drank and
bullshit, bullshit, bullshit --

NICOLE

Stop. Please stop.

WHIP

Is that why you shot dope?

NICOLE

That's not fair-

WHIP

Well there's a lot of people out
there who lost their mom who've
never had a drink in their life.

NICOLE

You're sick, Whip.

NICOLE walks away, leaving WHIP with his plane and his dream
of freedom. WHIP calls after her.

WHIP

I choose to drink.

NICOLE

Do you? You choose it? I don't
see a lot of choice goin' on.

WHIP

I choose to drink! And I blame it
on me. I'm happy to. I've got an
ex-wife and a son I don't see.
Why? Because I choose to drink!

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- WHIP'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

We follow WHIP as he enters the house and approaches the
doorway of the bedroom. WHIP sees NICOLE sitting on the bed.
She quickly tucks her cell phone away as WHIP holds up his
hand to signal a truce.

WHIP

Alright look, I was loaded when I crashed that plane. With this investigation going on, I don't know what's gonna happen. Come to Jamaica with me.

NICOLE

Whip. I'm afraid I'll use again.

WHIP

Come with me. I need help, I do.

NICOLE

I'd love for you to get help, Whip.

WHIP

When we get to Jamaica we can go to the local hospital. I'll do it for you. Anything you want.

NICOLE looks at the sincere love in his eyes.

NICOLE

I don't wanna use again. I can't. I won't make it back.

WHIP

I'll be sober. I won't force you to stay. I promise if you don't like it or if I don't clean up? You can leave.

This is the most sincere plea she's ever heard.

WHIP (CONT'D)

It's so beautiful there. We'll leave before noon. I'm a great pilot. You'll get to see so much.

WHIP wraps his arms around her. We stay on NICOLE's face as he holds her tighter and tighter.

INT. WHITAKER FARM -- KITCHEN -- EARLY MORNING

NICOLE is dressed and sitting at the kitchen table. Past NICOLE we can see WHIP lying in bed.

She has all her possessions in a crate and a duffel bag at her feet. She finishes a handwritten note and places it down. NICOLE picks up the note and begins to reread it.

She hears a car in the driveway -- she picks up her stuff and takes one last look at the sleeping WHIP. She leaves, careful not to make a sound.

EXT. WHITAKER FARM -- FRONT DOOR -- EARLY MORNING

NICOLE quietly exits the house, carrying a crate of her stuff. She has a duffel bag of clothes over her shoulder as she makes her way to SHEILA's car that we see parked at the top of the driveway, far from the house.

INT. WHITAKER RANCH -- BEDROOM -- LATER SAME DAY

WHIP stirs, wakes up and looks around. WHIP walks around looking for NICOLE. He finds the note and reads it. The reality of her disappearance sets in and he moves to the window and stares out at the barn.

WHIP returns his look inside the house and he sees the big book of AA on the table near where the letter was left. WHIP picks it up and throws it across the room. He then grabs the back of a chair and tosses it against the wall.

After wiping photos off of the wall he picks up an empty beer bottle and fires the bottle at a shelf on the opposite wall. The bottle explodes and WHIP stops as he realizes he came within an inch of shattering a framed photo of he and his son.

We hear the antiquated ring of the OLD HOUSE PHONE. WHIP relaxes his shoulders as the ringing phone distracts him.

Whip is now drawing heavy breaths as the ringing phone is answered by the old machine...

WHIP'S FATHER'S VOICE

You've reached the Whitaker Crop
Dusting Company, flying lessons and
plane rides. Please leave a message
and it will be returned. Thank
you.

The beep concludes...

CHARLIE

(speaking to voice mail)
Hey Whip, if you're there
pickup...I got some good news...

WHIP snatches the phone off the hook.

WHIP

Yeah, I'm here. What's goin' on?

104 WHIP listens as CHARLIE talks...

104

EXT. NTSB HANGAR -- RAINING -- DAY

WHIP sits in his car. Rain pounds the windshield as we watch him expertly add vodka to a half-full bottle of orange juice. WHIP gives the bottle a shake before taking a long drink.

WHIP takes another drink before re-capping the bottle and stowing it in the glove box. WHIP gets out and we watch him walk in the rain towards the door of the hangar. A SECURITY GUARD meets him and takes him inside.

INT. NTSB HANGAR -- THE REMAINS OF FLIGHT 227 - DAY

WHIP is now alone in the huge, brightly lit hangar. He sees the plane.

The JR-88 has all of its pieces laying as close together as possible. Like the skeleton of a T-Rex in a museum. The sight is awesome, breathtaking. WHIP walks closer to the twisted wreck and stops. WHIP is overwhelmed by the sight and as he is about to leave...

CHARLIE steps out of the passenger door and calls down to WHIP.

CHARLIE

Here's our guy. C'mon.

WHIP walks towards a ramp that leads up to the hole in the plane where the door used to be. CHARLIE stands at the top of the ramp. Suddenly HUGH steps out of the plane...

HUGH

Captain Whitaker, we've won.

WHIP doesn't move as HUGH starts down the ramp.

HUGH (CONT'D)

This is what we call in my profession a "walk over."

CHARLIE

They've scheduled the hearing. It's in 10 days.

CHARLIE and HUGH reach the bottom of the ramp.

HUGH

But these hearings can be tough. You just need to stay sharp and on course and answer the questions correctly. It's no longer a question of your condition but the condition of the plane.

This picks directly at the scab of WHIP's guilt.

HUGH (CONT'D)

I've had an "Act of God" successfully added to the list of probable causes.

WHIP

Look, it's simple. I flew a broken plane.

CHARLIE

You got it. That's right.

WHIP

And what about my toxicology report?

HUGH

(trying to stay calm)

I killed it. They have no physical proof that you were intoxicated on that plane. And no eye witness claims. But there's a problem.

This stops WHIP cold.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Because of the turbulence at the beginning of the flight and then the crash, there was never any drink service on the flight. But, they found two little vodka bottles in the galley trash bin. There was no physical evidence found on the bottles, no DNA, no finger prints. But both the bottles were uncapped and empty. The only people who had access to those bottles and could have drunk them were the flight crew. Margaret, Evans and Camelia Satou all had clean tox reports. That leaves you and Trina Marquez.

They let that land. WHIP nods.

WHIP

Okay. I see...where this is going.
That's funny that they found two
bottles.

HUGH

Why?

WHIP

Because I drank three. One's
missing.

HUGH explodes in frustration.

HUGH LANG

When I met you I couldn't believe
what a flip, drunk, arrogant
scumbag you were.

WHIP

Fuck you too, Hugh.

HUGH LANG

But I did the research and heard
the analysis from the experts. I'm
in awe of what you did.

WHIP

Can I go now?

HUGH gets big as he has to add the final piece of credence to
the coronation.

HUGH LANG

THE NTSB AND THE FAA TOOK 10
EXPERIENCED PILOTS AND PLACED THEM
IN SIMULATORS. THEY RECREATED ALL
OF THE EVENTS THAT LED TO THIS
PLANE FALLING OUT OF THE SKY!

HUGH is so loud and emotional even WHIP lends focus.

HUGH LANG (CONT'D)

Do you know how many were able to
safely land these broken planes?

Everyone waits for the response as HUGH acknowledges the
debris around them...

HUGH LANG (CONT'D)

Not one. Every pilot crashed and
killed everyone on board.

WHIP

Yeah. So?

HUGH

You have no capacity to accept the responsibility for the miracle you performed and the lives you saved.

WHIP

Great. I'm going home.

WHIP pulls out his cigarettes and frees a smoke from the pack.

HUGH LANG

Do you want to go to prison? I'm trying to save your life!

CHARLIE steps between them as this exchange spirals.

WHIP

What fucking life?! Don't kill yourself on my account, Hugh.

WHIP starts to walk away.

HUGH

Okay, I'm done here. I'm running out a faith that this guy's gonna make it, Charlie.

WHIP

(turns on Hugh)
You wanna talk about me like I'm not here? Like I'm fucking dead?

HUGH

(to Whip now)
This NTSB hearing is a Federal Agency Hearing. Do you understand that? It's in 10 days and if I show up with you like this?!

WHIP turns and walks. HUGH wheels on CHARLIE and lights him up.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Everything we've done? Everything I've done? Goes out the window. That's not on me. I did my job. It's your job, Charlie, to get him straight and get him to the church on time.

WHIP

Yeah Charlie just get him home.
Sober him up long enough to save
the union's contract and that fat
fuck's airline. Fuck you. I
shoulda died on that plane.

106 WHIP walks away from them -- away from the bright, clean, 106
shiny floor of the hangar and into the growing rain storm.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE THE WHITAKER FARM -- DAY

The rain has subsided as WHIP pulls up to his driveway.

Whip turns into the driveway and spots a NEWS VAN in front of
his house. He makes a U-turn and speeds away.

EXT. NICE MODEST SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD -- DAY

The rain has completely stopped but everything remains wet as
WHIP bangs his front tire in to the curb as he attempts to
park in front of a well-maintained house.

INT. WHIP'S BUICK -- PARKED - SAME TIME

111 WHIP checks the mirrors before taking a long drink from a 111
large orange juice bottle.

EXT. NICE MODERN SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD -- MOMENTS LATER

WHIP gets out of his car and makes his way across the street
and towards the house. We notice...

The DRIVER OF A BLACK PRIUS that has been parked farther down
the street gets out of his car, talking on a cell phone.

EXT. FRONT DOOR -- NICE SUBURBAN HOME -- SAME TIME

WHIP walks up the steps and knocks on the door. He waits a
beat and knocks again. Finally, it opens -- **DEANA**, an
attractive, well-dressed woman in her 40's, stands there
staring.

DEANA

What are you doing here?

WHIP

It's lovely to see you too Deana.
May I come in?

DEANA takes a moment before stepping aside to allow WHIP in.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME -- SAME TIME

WHIP glides into the kitchen of this fastidiously kept home.

WHIP

Thought I'd come see you and Will.

(calls out, loudly)

KNUCKLES! YOU HERE?

(it's very quiet)

We haven't talked at all since this whole thing happened and I just thought we should talk.

DEANA

You know that I prefer that you call us.

WHIP

Call you? Like anyone in this house has called me in the last three years to say anything other than "Where's the money?"

DEANA

Have you been drinking?

WHIP

Well that took...what? 17 seconds?

(fake checks his watch)

It took 17 seconds for you-

DEANA

I'm gonna ask you to step outside of the house, please.

WHIP

(has continued to rant)

LADIES and GENTLEMEN it took EXACTLY 17 SECONDS FOR DEANA COLEMAN to ask me if I have been drinking! A NEW WORLD RECORD!

DEANA

I'm calling the police.

WHIP

You're asking me to leave the house I bought for you?! Very good.

WILL (O.S.)

I'm telling you to leave.

WHIP turns to see his 16 year old son, **WILL**, standing at the foot of the stairs near the door.

WHIP

William Whitaker, junior. The man of the house. Nice of you to call me back.

WILL

I'm telling you to leave.

WHIP

You are? Are you the man of the house?

WILL

You upset my mother. You gotta go.

WHIP

I'm your father, tough guy.

WILL

You're a drunk. Now get the fuck out!

WHIP

You don't know who the fuck I am!

WILL

(pulling open the door)
I sure don't.

WHIP

What did you say?

WILL

I said, "I sure don't." Why don't you tell me? Who the fuck are you?! Who are you? Huh? WHO ARE YOU?!

DEANA now steps between them and pushes WILL towards the stairs as she puts her hand on the doorknob.

WHIP

I'm outta here. I'm outta here. I know where I'm not wanted.

WHIP turns quietly. He opens the door and walks outside to find...

A GROWING GALLERY OF NEWS RATS START JOSTLING FOR PICS

WHIP is completely caught off guard. They step right onto the tiny landing with him.

Through the fracas we hear a variety of questions lobbed at WHIP.

DEANA'S PORCH REPORTER #1

How come you won't talk to the press?

DEANA'S PORCH REPORTER #2

A lot of people are going out of their way to keep you out of the media, are you hiding something?

We hear the squelch of a police siren as a COP CAR lands on the scene.

DEANA'S PORCH REPORTER #3

Do you still live here, Captain Whitaker?

DEANA'S PORCH REPORTER #1

How well did you know Katerina Marquez, the flight attendant that died?

A REPORTER trips down the stairs. WHIP grabs one of these news rats and just before pounding him, he breaks in to a relaxed smile.

WHIP

Folks, please give us some room.
(gets down the stairs)
At the appropriate time I will tell my story. Now is a time for grieving and taking care of those injured. Thank you. I appreciate your interest in me but I ask that you leave my family in peace.

The GALLERY quiets to listen and record his words. WHIP again is incredibly smooth and intuitive while drunk and under pressure. We can hear the squawking of POLICE SIRENS approaching.

WHIP starts to head down the porch and the frenzy erupts again.

The POLICE begin to disperse the NEWS RATS. WHIP pulls an officer aside.

WHIP

I'm Captain Whitaker, I was-

YOUNG COP

Yes sir, I know who you are.

WHIP

Can you get me to my car?

YOUNG COP

(studies him)

Anything you need, sir.

WHIP walks with the YOUNG COP who shields him from the fray.

INT. WHIP'S BUICK -- DEANA'S STREET -- MINUTES LATER

We can see the YOUNG COP standing in front of the driver side door, shielding WHIP from the press who stay away.

116 WHIP exhales, trying to slow his racing heart and head. He's drunk but controlled. He looks at his hands. They are shaking.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE -- OFFICE - CLOSE ON TELEVISION - NIGHT

We see WHIP on the TV repeating the speech he gave reporters on DEANA's front lawn...

WHIP

Now is a time for grieving and taking care of those injured. Thank you. I appreciate your interest in me but I ask that you leave my family in peace.

A REPORTER now wraps up the piece...

TELEVISION

A reasonable request from a quiet, heroic man who's been through so much. This is Tilda Banden reporting from Devonwood.

Now a DESK ANCHOR changes stories...

DESK ANCHOR

In a related story, tonight at 10
Cale Rawson talks with aviation
experts to see if the tragedy of
flight 227 could have been avoided.

We boom down to find WHIP who looks drained as he sits on
CHARLIE's couch in the fastidiously neat office. WHIP holds
an unlit smoke.

The WOODEN POCKET DOORS SLIDE OPEN and CHARLIE's WIFE
gestures towards WHIP. WHIP stands as CHARLIE enters.

WHIP

Hey, Charlie. Thank you. Amanda
was so nice to let me in. It's
just...I couldn't find a safe
place.

AMANDA slides the door shut as CHARLIE throws his bag and his
coat down with gusto. He reaches up and pushes a button on
the TV and it goes off.

CHARLIE

What the hell is wrong with you? I
spoke to Hugh, he told me that you
went to your ex-wife's house?
Drunk as a skunk and the news crews
showed up?

(Whip just stares)

And the police escorted you out?

WHIP

I think it's okay. I've been
watching and I think it's okay.

CHARLIE

Hugh checked every media outlet
that covered it and it looks like
we're good. You come off fine.

WHIP

Okay. Good then. Listen Charlie,
here's the deal-

CHARLIE

No Whip. No deals. Look at you.
I have no idea what you're gonna do
or say, ever. You're all over the
place. I was the one guy in your
court. I was your apologist, your
defender. But not anymore.

WHIP

No. I can do this.

CHARLIE

You're about to be questioned by a Federal Agency about piloting an airliner drunk...an airliner that crashed. And you continue to drink and stumble around. What kind of crazy do you have to be to do that? I'm scared of you.

WHIP

Let's just stick to the plan.

CHARLIE

You can't stick to anything.

WHIP

This whole thing has just been so heavy, it's killing me. Tell Hugh, I can do it. Look, I really wanna fly again, get back to my life and be done with all this shit.

CHARLIE

This hearing is 10 days away. Hugh busted his ass to try to get you excused, but there's no way. You have to appear.

WHIP

Let me stay here. They have my houses all staked out now. Let me stay here until the hearing, Charlie. I won't leave the house.

CHARLIE takes a long look at his old, troubled friend.

CHARLIE

You can't drink here, Whip. You can't drink in my house. Can you do that?

WHIP

I won't drink.

INT. ST. JEROME HOTEL -- GUEST HALLWAY -- NIGHT

We watch a can of Coca Cola swing in WHIP's hand. We pull out to find WHIP walking with CHARLIE down a hallway of THE ST. JEROME HOTEL. Time has passed as WHIP looks the best we've ever seen him look. He is well rested, well dressed and carrying a suit in a wardrobe bag.

As we approach the open door to a guest room, HUGH pops out. A plain clothes SECURITY GUARD follows HUGH out of the room and stands behind him.

HUGH
You look great, Whip. I mean that.

WHIP
Thank you. I feel really good.

HUGH
I heard you haven't had a drink in
8 days.

WHIP
9 days...
(checks his watch)
Two hours and 26 minutes...but
who's counting?

CHARLIE addresses the SECURITY GUARD.

CHARLIE
Officer Edmonds?

OFFICER EDMONDS
Yes sir.

CHARLIE
Whip, Officer Edmonds will be
staying here tonight. Any problems
he'll handle it.

HUGH stands by the open door and gestures CHARLIE and WHIP inside...

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL -- WHIP'S ROOM -- NIGHT

HUGH walks in to the center of the room and turns to WHIP.

HUGH
Well, Whip we just wanted to make
this as easy for you as possible.

WHIP puts his wardrobe bag down on the bed.

CHARLIE

Just get a good night's rest.
Relax, order up a steak, get a
movie.

WHIP is checking his phone. HUGH gestures to CHARLIE for him
to leave so they can be alone.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Okay, cowboy, I'm out. The hearing
starts at 10, so we should plan on
9 for breakfast here in the room.

WHIP

Wait, Charlie, thanks for letting
me stay with you. I needed it.

CHARLIE

You did great cowboy.

WHIP

You've got a beautiful family.

CHARLIE

I'm very blessed.

CHARLIE leaves and HUGH joins WHIP at the window. HUGH hands
WHIP a thick folder.

HUGH LANG

I made you a copy of my entire file
on you and the investigation. I
also tried to anticipate what you
might be asked under oath and I
wrote out some non-damaging
responses. It's all in there;
photos, testimony, interviews...I
called Ellen Block let her know
that you're here and all tucked in.

WHIP

So does she have the knife out for
me?

HUGH LANG

Remember she's limited in what she
can ask you. You're not on trial
but you are under oath. She's
probably not happy that I killed
the tox report, but you'll be fine.

WHIP laughs a little.

HUGH LANG (CONT'D)
I'll see you in the morning.

The two respectfully nod. HUGH leaves and the door shuts behind him. WHIP puts the folder on the table and steps to the mini-bar. He bends down and opens the fridge...

WHIP sees the fridge is overly stocked with soda and juices. Every soft drink you can imagine. No booze, anywhere. WHIP chuckles about the alcohol removal as he grabs a coke.

WHIP unbuttons his shirt and pulls it out of his waist line.

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL -- WHIP'S ROOM -- LATER

Whip sits on the edge of the bed eating a room service steak. The File Folder sits on the table.

WHIP'S ROOM -- LATER

Now in his undershirt and shorts, Whip lies propped up on the bed watching television. The File Folder now rests on the bed.

WHIP'S BATHROOM -- LATER

Whip is meticulously shaving. He stares a long while at the disposable razor as the water runs over its blade. After a moment he goes back to shaving.

WHIP'S ROOM -- MUCH LATER

Whip sits at the small table looking through the file. He leafs through photos, with no recognizable emotion. He looks to the clock radio -- 12:37.

WHIP'S ROOM -- BATHROOM -- LATER AGAIN

We hear the shower running and steam fogs the mirrors.

WHIP'S ROOM -- LATER THAN THAT

WHIP wears boxers and a tee shirt with a towel around his neck. He looks to the clock -- 2:07

WE WATCH HIS SUIT BE PULLED FROM THE WARDROBE BAG.

WHIP lays the suit out neatly on the couch, separating the shirt which he hangs from a light fixture to relax any creases.

WHIP'S ROOM -- LATER YET AGAIN

The room is dark. A soft wind RATTLES the window sash. WHIP lies on the bed. He sighs, sleep is alluding him and the anxiety of tomorrow's events on no sleep has his head spinning. He hears a metallic click. He stays quiet to listen for it...there it is again. An annoying click.

The clock reads "3:43"--

He sits up and switches on the LIGHT. He rubs his eyes and goes to the table and sees the file folder laying there. As he is about to pick it up he hears the metallic click again. He goes to investigate.

HOTEL ROOM CONNECTING DOOR -- SAME TIME

The connecting door is unlocked. WHIP arrives and waits. He now watches as the connecting lock-bolt CLICKS against the frame -- the door swinging in a draft. He looks up to see the culprit -- a heating vent. WHIP flips the vent closed.

Whip now pushes the door with his finger, opening it a few inches. Nothing. Darkness.

WHIP
Hello? Anyone?

Whip enters.

INT. CONNECTING HOTEL ROOM -- SAME

The room is vacant. The bed is made. The drapes are pulled open.

WHIP walks quietly on the carpet towards the window. The night is clear. Quiet. Whip takes in the city lights.

WHIP'S POV --

Among the glass and steel office buildings, Whip spots a church spire. A simple cross is perched on top.

Whip looks at the church, deep in thought.

Then suddenly...

We HEAR A HUM. THE GENTLE HUM OF AN ELECTRIC MOTOR.

WHIP turns from the window and scans the room...

It's the MINI-BAR refrigerator -- HUMMING to life.

Whip stares at the gleaming black box. The WHIR of the motor seems to get LOUDER. Calling Whip. Beckoning him...

Whip looks at the fridge. His face is blank, His eyes tell us nothing. Then...

Whip steps toward the box.

CLOSE ON THE MINI-BAR. Whip swings open the door.

WHOOSH -- OUR DARK SCREEN LIGHTS.

COLORS SPARKLE as a cadre of tiny liquor bottles GLOW like jewels in a chest.

WHIP stares at the "glimmering gems" for a long, long time -- vodka, gin, wine, bourbon. The bottles SHIMMER -- AMBER, CRYSTAL, EMERALD, RUBY.

WHIP reaches for a frosted vodka mini bottle -- he gently pinches the neck of the bottle and lifts it out of the fridge. He holds up the mini vodka and considers it.

Now Whip slowly removes the stopper and smells the White Whiskey. He looks at the bottle once more, then slowly twists the tiny cap back on.

With a look of solemn resignation, Whip places the frosted mini bottle on top of the fridge and walks away.

WE STAY CLOSE ON THE BOTTLE. The CAMERA FOCUSES on the small bottle as a small droplet of condensation runs down its side -- ever so slowly, slowly. Then suddenly...

WHAP!!! In a flash, WHIP SCOOPS THE VODKA OUT OF FRAME!!

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL - ELEVATOR DOORS - MORNING

The ELEVATOR DOORS open and HUGH and CHARLIE step out and head down the hallway.

We follow our guys as they approach WHIP's room, finding OFFICER EDMONDS exactly where we left him -- in front of WHIP's door.

EXT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL - HALLWAY - WHIP'S DOOR - DAY

OFFICER EDMONDS stands up as CHARLIE and HUGH approach carrying coffees.

CHARLIE

Good morning, how's our man?

OFFICER EDMONDS

Not a peep.

CHARLIE knocks on the door and checks his watch as he waits for WHIP to answer. CHARLIE cocks his head, knocks again.

CHARLIE

I think your pilot overslept.

HUGH

You didn't let any girls in there last night did you?

OFFICER EDMONDS

No sir, not a soul. No one came in or out.

They all wait awkwardly as HUGH checks his watch and knocks on the door. More silence...

OFFICER EDMONDS (CONT'D)

I have a room key.

CHARLIE takes the room key and lets himself in.

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL -- WHIP'S ROOM -- MORNING

CHARLIE carefully enters WHIP's room. He is spooked by the silence. HUGH joins him as they take in the room. The bed looks slept in and the room service dinner tray rests politely on the dining table but WHIP is nowhere to be found.

HUGH LANG

Did he disappear?

CHARLIE tentatively walks around the empty room, the bathroom, the closet, until he finally sees the adjoining room door. He turns to HUGH with a surprised look.

CHARLIE

Whip? Hello?

CHARLIE knocks on the slightly opened adjoining door. No response, so CHARLIE lightly tosses the door open.

INT. ADJOINING ROOM -- SAME TIME

CHARLIE looks in to find the scene of the crime. Smoke still hangs in the air and empty bottles and cans cover every surface in the room. HUGH joins him...

HUGH
Where is he?

CHARLIE
Whip? WHIP!

CHARLIE closes his eyes and says a silent prayer as he heads for the bathroom...

BATHROOM -- ADJOINING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

CHARLIE is stopped by the sight of WHIP's lifeless body wedged between the tub and the toilet.

CHARLIE
WHIP?!!! WHIP!!!

CHARLIE turns WHIP over to see his non-responsive face. HUGH arrives and freaks out.

HUGH
Is he dead?

CHARLIE
I DON'T KNOW!!!

HUGH
IS HE DEAD?!

WHIP
Yes!!! I'm dead!!!

CHARLIE shows immediate relief that WHIP is breathing. OFFICER EDMONDS has joined them.

OFFICER EDMONDS
Should I get an ambulance?

CHARLIE
Yes!

HUGH
Wait!...just wait, Charlie...let's think about this.

The two stare at each other and realize they are both breathing heavily from the shock and stress of their predicament.

CHARLIE
Get him to the bed...
(to the Officer)

Can you wait outside and don't let anyone in here? Thank you.

EDMONDS leaves. CHARLIE and HUGH drag WHIP out of the bathroom and flop him on the bed. HUGH explodes.

HUGH

Son of a bitch! You worthless motherfucker, what a waste! I cleared the decks for you...you piece of shit. You just fucked it all up like the piss drunk you are!

HUGH grabs at WHIP's collar and WHIP actually sits up and reaches for HUGH, a nice sign of life from WHIP.

CHARLIE

WOAH!!! WOAH!!! WOAH!!! Enough!

CHARLIE pulls HUGH away from WHIP who falls back on the bed.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What time is it?

HUGH

9:14, the hearing is in 46 minutes.

CHARLIE

How much grace do you think we got?

WHIP

Amazing grace...how sweet the sound...that saved a wretch like me-

HUGH

Shut the fuck up you drunk...

WHIP

I once was lost and now I'm found was blind but...now...well I'm still kinda blind.

CHARLIE

We probably have an hour before we really need to get him to the hearing and it's just downstairs.

HUGH

We need a wheel chair.

WHIP

Call Harling Mays.

CHARLIE
Harling's got a wheel chair?

WHIP
Harling's got cocaine.

HUGH
Cocaine? Cocaine?!

HUGH and CHARLIE exchange a desperate look...

CHARLIE
WHAT'S HIS NUMBER!?

HUGH
This is fucking insane. And
criminal.

WHIP
609-237-1184. We're in 609 so
just...

CHARLIE
(dialing)
237...1184...

WHIP
Tell him I need bananas...

129

129

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL -- WHIP'S ROOM -- MORNING

CHARLIE prays for a voice on the other end...it appears...

CHARLIE
Harling? Harling this is Charlie.
I'm a friend of Whip's...yeah. We
need you to do a very early, very
discreet...uhm...Whip needs bananas
and you need to bring them to The
St. Jerome Hotel downtown...how
many bunches of bananas?
(Whip holds up 3 fingers)
3 is the answer I'm getting -- you
will be well compensated...the The
St. Jerome Hotel room 1027...

CHARLIE hangs up and looks at WHIP who is mostly passed out
again. CHARLIE looks to HUGH.

INT. THE. ST. JEROME HOTEL -- ELEVATOR BANK -- SAME TIME

The elevator opens and we see HARLING step from the elevator with his knapsack over his shoulder. Teva sandals, sunglasses.

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL -- WHIP'S ROOM -- MORNING

WHIP has a towel around his neck as he tries to sip coffee. CHARLIE sits opposite him at the small table by the window.

The door bursts open, and HARLING storms in.

HARLING MAYS

(singing)

*Come mista tally man tally me
banana...Whip, what's the deal man
you look like you're hurtin' for
certain...shut the door, interior
lock!*

HARLING places a leather doctor's bag on the table. An anxious CHARLIE reaches for the bag which sets HARLING into a frenzy.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

YOU DO NOT TOUCH THE MERCH
MOTHERFUCKER!!!

It's quiet as HARLING gives orders.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

Everyone except Whip and myself
take three steps away from the
table.

As they step away, HARLING now pulls a beautiful silver-framed mirror from his bag and a blue coke grinder, he calmly but sternly delivers orders...

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

I need three things.
(focuses on Charlie)
Two glasses of water, a credit card
and a hundred dollar bill.

CHARLIE

All I have is a twenty.

HARLING MAYS

(takes the card and bill)
That'll do. And I need to make a
coco puff.

HARLING Tosses a pack of smokes to CHARLIE.

CHARLIE

A what?

HUGH takes the smokes from CHARLIE and pulls out a cigarette.

HARLING stops grinding, opens the lid and pours out a nice smooth pile of coke. He begins a masterful ballet of cocaine manipulation.

HUGH

Millions of dollars hang in the balance.

HUGH is removing the last quarter of an inch of tobacco from the end of the cigarette.

CHARLIE

They hang on the consumption of a 300 dollar bag of cocaine.

HARLING uses the credit card to groom the coke into neat piles and lines. He has a system.

WHIP's head sags as he again appears ready to pass out.

HARLING MAYS

Okay Whip, just two small whiffs first...one on each side...just a primer.

Using the mirror as a tray, HARLING holds the rolled up 20 dollar bill just above the line of coke. WHIP slowly manages to place his face in position to ingest the coke. It's tense as his head wobbles. He finally zeroes in and snorts the first line. HARLING quickly switches nostrils. WHIP sniffs the other side.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

Atta boy, head back now. Swallow. Water, chief, you! Water.

CHARLIE puts the glass of water to WHIP's mouth. WHIP drinks.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)

(snaps his fingers)
Coco puff...

HUGH hands HARLING the cigarette with a slightly hollowed out tip. HARLING leans over the coke with the cigarette in his mouth and hoovers up a small pile, sucking the coke through the cigarette.

HARLING sits up, careful to keep the cocaine in the end of the cigarette. He tips it up and lights it.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)
 Little coco puff buddy. C'mon
 banana man. Who's the banana man?

WHIP's head levels a look to Harling with a smile that leads us to believe that he is actually making a rally.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)
 Good man, focus up big dog. Here's
 the train comin' to you.

HARLING takes a puff and holds it as he extends the cocaine cigarette to WHIP. WHIP is more nimble now as he cocks his head in acceptance of the cigarette. WHIP takes a drag and holds it.

HARLING MAYS (CONT'D)
 (still holding the smoke)
 Keep it down big dog, banana boat's
 comin' tell me the banana boat's
 comin'...

WHIP finally exhales the smoke, HARLING does too. WHIP smiles.

WHIP
 The banana boat is here.

HARLING MAYS
 Nothing can keep you down dog.
 Nothing keeps the big dog down.

CHARLIE
 Okay, we gotta go.

HARLING has crafted 4 big lines now, he snorts one himself in record time. Looks to HUGH and CHARLIE.

HARLING MAYS
 You guys are up.

HUGH
 No, I'm good. Charlie?

CHARLIE
 Are you fucking crazy?

WHIP jumps in and sniffs 2 huge lines. He looks to HARLING.

WHIP
 Thanks brother, I'm back.

HARLING gathers his things, stands and hugs WHIP.

HARLING MAYS

I love you man.

WHIP

I love you too.

HUGH and CHARLIE are quiet as they watch the strange but sincere drug-fueled emotion pass between two old friends. HARLING eyes CHARLIE before handing him a baggie.

HARLING MAYS

There's a gram in here, you paid for it and he might need it. My work here is done. See you all on the dark side of the moon.

HARLING leaves and our TRIO exchange looks, "Did that just happen?"

EXT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL -- GUEST HALLWAY -- DAY

133

The opening bars of Joe Cocker's "Feelin' Alright" crackle just before we see WHIP step out of the hotel room and begin a relatively steady strut down the hallway. Deja Vu. Sunglasses on, WHIP is backed by HUGH and CHARLIE who flank him from a few steps behind. Further back we can see that OFFICER EDWARDS also exits the room wearing latex gloves, carrying a large plastic garbage bag that obviously holds any evidence of the debauched night or the morning's resurrection.

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL -- ELEVATOR -- DAY

WHIP, HUGH and CHARLIE ride the elevator. WHIP is buttoning his shirt and fixing his tie. It is miraculous how the coke has revived him. A MOM and her 8 year old DAUGHTER get on the elevator.

CHARLIE

Morning.

We watch as a small trickle of blood escapes from WHIP's left nostril. HUGH pulls a handkerchief from his pocket, hands it to WHIP.

HUGH

Your nose...

WHIP accepts the handkerchief and wipes his nose. WHIP sees blood on the cloth and tilts his head back.

We now see that there is a mirrored ceiling to the elevator. WHIP tries to study his reflection in the ceiling as he holds the hankie to his nose. WHIP begins to wobble and CHARLIE helps him regain his balance.

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL-ELEVATOR LOBBY-MOMENTS LATER

Our TRIO walk as tall as they can towards the hearing room.

HUGH

I'm gonna head in and tell Ellen
Block that we're here.

HUGH hustles off as CHARLIE pulls close to WHIP.

CHARLIE

You're gonna make it. Remember, if
they ask about your drinking, it's
totally acceptable to say, "I don't
recall."

WHIP wheels on CHARLIE and unloads with focused anger...

WHIP

Do not tell me how to lie about my
drinking. I've been lying about my
drinking my whole life.

As we disappear in to WHIP's weary eyes we hear the distinctive sound of a jetliner screaming through the air.

INT. THE ST. JEROME HOTEL - BALL ROOM - NTSB HEARING-DAY

On TWO LARGE SCREENS we watch the grainy cell phone footage shot by a witness of SOUTHJET FLIGHT 227's final moments in the sky. ACCOMPANYING the Video is the REAL AUDIO of the cockpit voice recording...

The room has a dais where the NTSB board members sit. A large blue curtain is the backing for the round NTSB shield that hangs above the proceedings. A large drop down screen will show images, graph and text as needed by the NTSB.

A confident woman, ELLEN BLOCK, approaches carrying a file which she lays on the podium.

ELLEN BLOCK

Those are difficult images to
watch. For the record, I'm Ellen
Block, Hearing Officer for this
hearing. Captain Whitaker, good
morning.

We see WHIP who looks rough but stable in his witness chair.

WHIP

Morning.

ELLEN BLOCK

What was captured on that video is that the aircraft was in a relatively stable glide just prior to the moment of impact. However, according to the data we retrieved from the cockpit data recorders, at exactly 9:34, after flying 27 minutes without incident, the transponder recorded a loss in altitude in excess of 4800 feet per minute in what is considered a "full pitch nose down" attitude. Then at 9:42, according to the data recorders, a decision was made to invert the aircraft. The NTSB has created animated simulation that I would like to play at this point.

ELLEN points to the screen...

An NTSB animation shows the plane pitching down and we follow it through the inversion of the plane while listening to the real audio of the flight crew.

The animation has a split screen that also shows the instruments and printed text of what's being said.

We hear...**"What's your son's name?" "Why?" "The black box" "I love you, Trevor. Be a good boy, Mommy loves you." "What are we doing?! Why would I trim down?!" "We're gonna roll it. Ready? Here we go. I've got control."**

That last statement seems to echo as the presentation stops and the lights come back up. We return to the hearing in progress.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

That audio is tragic and compelling. I chose to play that part of the cockpit recording to highlight a key moment aboard flight 227, wherein you say "We're gonna roll it, here we go, I've got control." You made a very conscious decision to invert the airplane, to roll the plane upside down. Is that correct?

WHIP

I'm not sure it was conscious. It was more of an instinct.

ELLEN BLOCK

What led to that decision?

WHIP is clearly struggling in his chair. The coke got him there but it may start to fail him soon.

WHIP

I don't recall.

ELLEN BLOCK

Let me quote from an investigative summary..."From 9:34 until 9:42 the events on the aircraft are"...again I quote, "bold and remarkable"... "By inverting the plane, Captain Whitaker arrested the descent and allowed the aircraft to level off enabling him to glide the aircraft away from any populated areas and allowing him to execute a forced landing in an open field.

We hear a smattering of applause as the facts of his actions are remarkable.

WHIP

I heard a metallic bang. We pitched nose down. No control.

WHIP looks ashen as the booze and chemicals are still coursing through his exhausted frame.

ELLEN BLOCK

You had no idea what was wrong with the aircraft?

WHIP

There was a lot of things wrong with that aircraft.

WHIP glances towards HUGH and CHARLIE who are poker-faced.

ELLEN BLOCK

As I said before you can add any details you like to any comments I make. Do you remember any thing else that was out of the ordinary? Did you feel the flight crew was in their best shape?

WHIP takes a minute to digest this question.

WHIP

Yes.

ELLEN BLOCK

It was raining very hard the morning you took off, wasn't it?

WHIP

There was some convective activity in the area. However, my first officer and I discussed the conditions on the field and determined that we were safely within our visibility and crosswind minimums.

ELLEN BLOCK

Yes, first officer Evans' testimony confirms the same.

WHIP goes quiet as ELLEN BLOCK looks at him over her glasses, seeing if he has any reaction. WHIP smiles.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

I want to show you something.

HUGH is frozen in a steely gaze; CHARLIE seems to hold his breath.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

Nothing's happening.

ELLEN points her remote at the projector but it doesn't work.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

This remote is not working. Apologies. I can do it manually.

She shrugs and heads down onto the stage closer to WHIP where she can advance the slides by touching the projector.

We now see a screen where a slide is showing a long metal screw the size of a trombone.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

This is the jackscrew on the tail assembly which articulates the horizontal stabilizer--also known as the elevator. As you can see, the threads on this screw are almost entirely gone. "

Substandard thread life" is how we reported it. This part was suggested as a maintenance replacement in January of 2010. It was never replaced.

This had 1200 additional hours of flight on it. It finally failed.

AN ANIMATION SHOWS THE TAIL ASSEMBLY.

We watch the elevator acting as a wing on the tail that goes up or down and makes a plane get lift or descend.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

Our investigators have concluded that the jackscrew snapped and the elevator was frozen in a fixed position, locking the elevator in a down position which forced the plane into a dive. The loss of the elevator was, and I quote our report, a "catastrophic event, from which recovery was improbable and stable flight impossible."

Everyone goes quiet as those words resonate. ELLEN's tone changes as she understands how hard this is for some people to hear as they think of their loved ones spending their last living minutes on this earth in sheer terror.

It is deathly quiet in the ballroom. Even the PRESS are silent.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

Again I quote..."From 9:34 until 9:42 the piloting decisions made by Captain Whitaker were bold and remarkable. The fact that Captain Whitaker commanded that the aircraft stay inverted while descending to an extremely low altitude shows a miraculous intuition that in this instance saved 96 lives."

A genuine applause spreads from the hearing room. ELLEN BLOCK allows this moment to happen.

WHIP is fading, dazed and uncomfortable with the unexpected adulation. He stands up.

WHIP

I appreciate that.

The room gets quiet as WHIP's demeanor seems terse.

WHIP stares at ELLEN, white with sweat and chemicals. We see HUGH grind his jaw as this line of questioning has him on tilt.

ELLEN BLOCK

Mr. Whitaker, I want to talk about the days leading and hours leading up to the accident. But before I do, I want to remind you that you are under oath and any testimony that you give here today will be considered admissable in any subsequent hearings or criminal proceedings, do you understand what that means?

WHIP nods.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

Captain Whitaker, for the record I need you to verbalize your answer.

WHIP

Yes, I understand.

ELLEN BLOCK

On the three days leading up to the day of the accident -- Tuesday, October 11th, Wednesday, October 12th or Thursday, October 13th of 2011 -- did you consume any alcohol or other intoxicating elements?

WHIP takes his time.

WHIP

No. I did not.

HUGH AND CHARLIE

Sit stone faced in the second row feeling the relief of months of hard work.

ELLEN BLOCK continues with a rote posture...

ELLEN BLOCK

On the morning of the accident, Friday, October 14th, did you consume any alcohol or ingest any chemicals or drugs that may have impaired your ability to perform your job?

WHIP

No. I did not.

ELLEN wraps up this line of questions...

ELLEN BLOCK

Mr. Whitaker, do you now or have you ever had a problem with alcohol dependency, alcoholism or drug addiction?

WHIP waits for her to look at him...this takes a while...

WHIP

No.

HUGH maintains a poker face; CHARLIE appears relieved.

ELLEN sorts through her notes one last time.

ELLEN BLOCK

Okay, Mr. Whitaker, we're about done.

(She refers to her notes)

Due to the severe turbulence during the early part of the flight, you asked the flight crew to suspend the beverage service on the plane. Is that correct?

WHIP

Yes. I suspended the drink service.

ELLEN BLOCK

Are you aware that our investigators found two single-service Vodka bottles in the galley trash bin?

Slides now show the TWO SMALL VODKA BOTTLES in evidence.

WHIP

Yes.

ELLEN BLOCK

There were 5 crew members on board the flight who would have had access to the beverage trolley. Less than an hour after the accident, blood was taken from each of the crew members. Yourself...

A SOUTHJET CORPORATE PHOTO OF WHIP pops on to the large monitors. After ELLEN references a member of the flight crew, their photo pops on to the monitors...

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

First Officer Evans, flight attendant Margaret Thomason and posthumously from Camelia Satou and Katerina Marquez.

KATERINA MARQUEZ PHOTO does not pop up on the screen...yet.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

A toxicology analysis was performed and three of these tests came back negative, one was disqualified for technical reasons...

Hugh smiles -- satisfied.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

And one tested positive for alcohol. It registered a .17 blood alcohol level. Are you aware of that?

WHIP

I am now.

ELLEN BLOCK

Miss Marquez was not only a colleague, but you knew her outside of work? Correct?

WHIP

Outside of work? Not really.

ELLEN BLOCK

Did you know Miss Marquez had a drinking problem?

WHIP

No. I did not.

ELLEN BLOCK

Did you ever see her drink to excess?

WHIP

No. I did not.

ELLEN BLOCK

Did you know that she was twice treated for alcohol addiction? The last time was 16 months ago and paid for by SouthJet Airlines?

WHIP

No. I did not.

A picture of Trina's beautiful smiling face FLASHES UP ON THE BIG SCREEN.

ELLEN BLOCK

Is it your opinion that Katerina Marquez drank the vodka on the plane?

WHIP smiles at the photo of TRINA as if she can see him. He then shakes his head to snap from the memory of her great spirit. He gets serious as he bears his look down on ELLEN.

WHIP

Can you repeat the question?

ELLEN BLOCK

Your opinion Captain. Is it your opinion that Katerina Marquez drank on that flight?

Whip shakes. He runs his trembling hand through his hair.

WHIP

I'm sorry. My what...

ELLEN BLOCK

Since her toxicology report is the only toxicology report that is admissible in this hearing, and she in fact tested positive for alcohol, is it your opinion that Katerina Marquez drank those 2 bottles of vodka on the flight?

Whip drops his head and MUTTERS SOMETHING INAUDIBLE.

ELLEN BLOCK (CONT'D)

I'm sorry Mr. Whitaker, I couldn't hear you. What did you say?

WHIP

I SAID...God help me...

A confused MUMBLE rises in the room. Whip's response flusters ELLEN for a moment, but she recovers quickly.

ELLEN BLOCK

Yes, well. However, is it your opinion...

Whip cuts her off...

WHIP

(excessively loud)

IT'S MY OPINION...

(lowers his voice)

It's my opinion...

Trina DID NOT...drink the vodka.

ELLEN BLOCK

Excuse me, Mr. Whitaker...

WHIP

(softly, to himself)

She saved that boy's life...

ELLEN BLOCK

Captain Whitaker can you speak louder-

WHIP

(loud again)

I KNOW FOR A FACT THAT SHE DID NOT DRINK THAT VODKA...

Whip stops. His whole body trembles, his face tightens. He looks right at ELLEN...

WHIP (CONT'D)

...because I did. I drank the vodka.

The crowd gasps, unsure of what they just heard...

CHARLIE rockets out of his chair.

CHARLIE

OBJECTION!!!

NTSB OFFICER #2

Please be seated sir. This is not a court room.

Now CHARLIE returns to his chair to find that HUGH is gone. CHARLIE looks around for HUGH, no sign. He's vanished.

WHIP leans close to the microphone.

WHIP

I drank the vodka bottles on the plane.

ELLEN BLOCK

Mr. Whitaker, in light of that remark, would you like to readdress...

WHIP

You don't have to readdress anything. I DRANK THE VODKA!

ELLEN BLOCK

On the three nights before the accident, October 11th-

WHIP

On October 11th, 12th and 13th and 14th I was intoxicated. I drank alcohol on all of those days. I drank to excess.

Chaos erupts further as REPORTERS outnumber SECURITY. Flash bulbs pop repeatedly and large lights are aimed at the fracas on stage as video is taken of the bizarre melee.

ELLEN BLOCK

Mr. Whitaker, on the morning of October-

WHIP

I was drunk. I'm drunk right now, Miss Block...I'm drunk right...
(Whip finally breaks down)
I'm drunk now, because...
Because I'm an alcoholic.

We have pushed into a tight shot on WHIP's face as the sound in the room fades away. We stay tight on WHIP's face as he lets the moments unfold.

Suddenly the noise cuts to silence. WHIP is looking at the assembly. WHIP wipes tears from his eyes. We hear WHIP's voice as the dialogue pre-laps the image of his face.

WHIP (V.O.)

That was it...I was done. It's as if I'd hit my life long limit for lies.

A new angle shows WHIP speaking these words...

WHIP

I could not tell one more lie. And maybe I'm a sucker. Because if I had just told one more lie? I could have walked away from that whole mess and kept my wings and my false sense of pride and most importantly I would have avoided being locked up here with all of you nice folks for the last 13 months.

We hear laughter as we pull out from WHIP to realize that he is in fact wearing a white penal jumpsuit and leading an AA meeting in a Federal Prison.

WHIP (CONT'D)

It looks like I will serve every day of the remaining 4 plus years of my sentence. And that's fair. I betrayed the public trust. I did. That's what the judge explained to me. I had betrayed the public trust. The FAA took my license. And that's fair. The chances of me flying again are slim to none. And I accept that.

INT. MCRAE FEDERAL PENITENTIARY -- GEORGIA -- DAY

A large room houses an AA meeting for about 50 inmates wearing white jumpsuits. WHIP continues his story.

WHIP

I've had time to think about all of it. Doing a lot of writing. I've written letters to each of the families that lost loved ones on my flight. Some were able to hear my apology, some never will. I've also apologized to all the people who tried to help me along the way, but I couldn't or wouldn't listen, like my wife, I mean my ex wife...

(he gets emotional)

...and my son. Again, some were able to forgive me...some never will.

(collects himself)

But at least I'm sober, and I'm grateful for that.

Whip gives it to us straight...

WHIP (CONT'D)

And this is gonna sound really stupid coming from a man who's in prison...but for the first time in my life...I'm free.

We hold close on WHIP's face as we hear the metallic clang of prison doors shutting. On the sound we cut to...

INT. FEDERAL PENITENTIARY -- CELL -- DAY

We pan across the concrete cell wall, looking at a small, personal photo collage. We see a photo of NICOLE and SHEILA and a few other AA FOLKS surrounding WHIP who sits in front of a birthday cake in the common room of the prison. We see a photo of WHIP's DAD as an airman. We ultimately land on a photo of NICOLE. We recognize it as the photo WHIP took on the porch of the Whitaker Farm.

We pan down to find WHIP writing in a journal. A GUARD comes to the front of his cell.

GUARD

Whitaker, you got a visitor.

WHIP looks at the GUARD and nods before taking a last glance at the photo of NICOLE.

EXT. FEDERAL PENITENTIARY -- GUEST YARD -- DAY

WHIP sits at a lone picnic table in a fence-enclosed courtyard. He checks his watch and looks up.

WHIP stands and walks towards us, towards his visitor. As he gets closer we see a smile break across his face. A smile we haven't seen since he first saw NICOLE. We reverse to see...

WILL -- WHIP's 17 year old son stands next to a GUARD.

GUARD

You have 40 minutes.

WHIP

Knuckles, you're looking good.

(beat)

I sent you something for your birthday.

WILL

Yeah. I got it.

Another beat as they can't find a way in to a conversation.

WHIP

This is a real surprise; a great surprise. I haven't seen you-

WHIP chokes up. WILL nods. It's intense. WHIP motions to the table and they both sit. WILL pulls out a notebook.

WILL

College counselor thought I should come and interview you.

WHIP

Great. An interview. Okay.

WILL

I'm writing essays for college applications.

WHIP studies him and laughs...WILL nods and tries to smile.

WHIP

Listen Will, it means everything to me that you came here. You are an amazing kid and you deserve great things...

Again WHIP has to tamp down his emotions.

WILL

So can you help me with this essay?

WHIP

Yeah. Of course.

WILL pulls out a small voice recorder and clicks it on...

WILL

This essay. I have to do an essay called, "the most fascinating person I've never met."

The two men just look at each other.

WHIP

And that's me?

WILL nods, both men are struggling to keep it together.

WILL

Can we pick up where we left off?

WHIP nods, unsure as to where this is going.

WHIP

Okay.

WILL

Who are you?

WHIP

Good question.

WHIP smiles...a great, familiar question. He begins to alternately laugh and sob as there is great relief in the promise of a connection with his son.