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## Behind the Sunglasses

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The rows of cushy seats stretched forward white and gleaming, like a pillbox. Other passengers chatted to each other, family members or perhaps new friends, but nobody sat beside him or noticed him. Perfect. He needed his own row on the plane – no witnesses to get suspicious, no chumps trying to make friendly conversation and setting off the roiling bile that stirred in his stomach.

Deep breath. Another sip of bourbon and soda, resting it on the briefcase in his lap. The flight attendant who had brought it to him attended the front of the cabin now. No sense in calling her back, although he wanted to, just for the poetic efficiency. One person attending all his demands the whole flight. It would be just like a movie scene. He would make do with the nearest one, though. It would be better that way, if he was being realistic. More people seeing him meant more confused and contradictory narratives when it came time to tell the police. That's probably how it worked.

He checked his ticket once more, as a reassurance. Dan Cooper, it said. It was just a name he had gotten off a Belgian comic book character, a heroic paratrooper. It seemed funny to him while he was standing in line working out what his alias was going to be, but now, thousands of feet in the air, it was a totem. He was a different person on this plane. He could do anything that Dan Cooper could. The bile in his stomach settled a bit. He only had half an hour to do this, before the plane landed in Seattle, and he had better not lose his nerve.

The nearest attendant was nearly two rows behind him, in the very rear of the plane. She was picturesque – a smart, modern hairstyle of bangs and a bob, and her blue, collared uniform with that just-too-short skirt revealing her nice thighs. She could be his leading lady, he thought, as she walked past him. A note was passed to her from his hand, before he really had any idea he was doing it. She plucked it almost unconsciously with her left hand – he saw a wedding ring – and slipped it into her pocket in one smooth motion.

His hand clenched on the armrest. She thought he was giving her his number. Nothing could be further from the truth. And now she was walking away. "Miss!" he leaned forward and whispered to her. "You'd better look at that

note. I have a bomb."

It wasn't until she took the folded piece of paper out of her pocket that he allowed himself to look around, just in case anyone had noticed him. Nobody had. Still perfect. He leaned back, composing himself, reassured – what was a good movie scene without a little audience scare?

Instead he observed the stewardess's face as she absorbed the note. He didn't need to see it to know what he, in neat capital letters, had written on it – "I have a bomb in my briefcase. Do not try anything. Sit down next to me so that I can tell you what I need."

Her eyes sucked back into her skull and her pretty throat quivered. She stole a glance at him. He allowed the corners of his mouth to move slightly upward. "I'll take that back, now."

Hand shaking, she offered it and he plucked it away. It took all his concentration to not let his own hands erupt in a volley of vibrations, but he had to be smooth about this. Into his breast pocket it went, next to the ticket. He tapped the seat next to him expectantly.

She nodded and squeezed through – he sat on the outside seat and she had to shimmy around him, arcing her legs awkwardly so as to avoid jostling the briefcase. At one point she nudged it, the black leather corner poking at her exposed thigh, and she halted, trembling. But nothing happened. Nothing would happen, no matter what she did. The bomb was a fake.

Nobody needed to know that.

She finally sat down and stared straight at the seat in front of her, not making eye contact with him. That was fine. He allowed her to keep staring, her lips quivering and occasionally attempting to form words, rehearsing what she had to say. He enjoyed being the one in control, drawing out the moment.

After many such sluggish seconds, she turned to him and whispered, "Can I see the bomb?"

This was the gambit – if she knew anything about dynamite, she might be able to see that his was fake, that dynamite wasn't really shiny bright red but usually some sort of dull brown. But why should she know anything about dynamite? He knew he was safe. Unlatching the clasps of his briefcase, he swiveled it to her and opened it up, just the tiniest bit.

The look of deepening horror in her eyes told him that his bluff had been successful. Two rows of four bright red sticks, mass of unconnected wires, and a clock that counted down to nothing were the only things in this briefcase, but it didn't matter. He snapped the case closed.

"I want you to relay this message to your captain," he said. Instinctively his eyes met hers – damn! He didn't realize she had actually turned to look at him instead of staring at the briefcase, perhaps curious at the eyes of a man who would try to hijack a plane. She saw them, alright. Her eyes were full of reproach and curiosity – not the anger and fear he had expected. For an instant, his reserve faltered. But he pressed on with his well-rehearsed demands."

I need \$200,000 in negotiable American currency. I realize you don't have this on-board, of course. Once we land in Seattle and all the passengers of this plane disembark, I want that money delivered to me. A fuel truck should also be waiting when we land in order that the plane should refuel. I will remain here with the bomb, ready to detonate it should anything go amiss. Once I have the money, we will take off again with a skeleton crew and then fly south over California. I will also need four parachutes." He delivered this all in one breath. He was unable to look at her, but covered for it well by looking at her earring, or her hands, or her nose, but never directly into her eyes, not again.

"Do you understand?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Repeat it to me so that I know you understand, please."

"\$200,000... we land in Seattle, refuel... uh, we take off again, fly south, and you need four parachutes."

"That's exactly right," he said. "Now go to your captain."

A nod from her, and she got up and shimmied back out of the seat. Her walk back to the front was calm and composed, not at all the panicky reaction he expected and frankly wanted. Instead he sat, blinking too fast, heart hammering. Was it just because he had done it, finally, with no turning back? Surely anyone would be nervous if they created this situation for themselves. Hopefully it wasn't much. Oh, but those eyes...

Sunglasses. He had a pair of sunglasses in his other breast pocket. He fumbled around and put them on, and suddenly the world was darker and cooler, more manageable, more black-and-white, like an old movie. A movie he was the star in. He had to be.

Outside the window stretched the city of Tacoma, grey steel rivets piercing a lake in the shadow of a bleary mountain. Dark clouds roiled above, carrying rain and wind, enough hostile nature to beat a body to smithereens and scatter their remains in the sea, never again to be found. The clouds cared nothing for films. Their toll had to be exacted.