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SIX SECONDS IN THE TOWER

Lead Focused / Thriller / 5-6 min
Cast 3-4 Female x2 Male x2

Margo is training a new tower controller on a rainy evening shift. A slow aircraft on the runway and a jet on final turn a routine crossing into a conflict. When the trainee freezes, the supervisor moves to take over, and Margo has seconds to decide who talks.

CHARACTERS

MARGO (LEAD) - 40s, tower training instructor, calm, exacting, has washed out trainees before and hated it

OWEN - 20s, trainee controller, sharp on paper, working local control for the first time in weather

DALE - 50s, tower supervisor, cautious, would rather be blamed for a scrub than a miss

LENA - 30s, ground controller at the next position, can be cut

SETTING

An airport control tower cab at dusk in the rain, during a training shift.

An airport control tower at dusk. Rain on the glass. MARGO stands behind OWEN, who sits at the local control position with a headset. DALE, the supervisor, is at the back of the cab. LENA works ground control to one side.

MARGO

Talk me through it.

OWEN

Harlan two twenty on a six mile final for two seven. Tango four four kilo holding short at Bravo, I've cleared him to cross. Cutter nine one is in position, I'll release him when four four kilo is clear.

MARGO

Good. Where's four four kilo now?

OWEN

He's... he's still at Bravo.

MARGO

He read back the crossing?

OWEN

He read it back.

MARGO

Then why is he still at Bravo?

OWEN keys the mic.

OWEN

Tango four four kilo, tower, confirm
crossing two seven at Bravo.

Pause. He listens.

OWEN

(to Margo)

He says he's crossing. He's moving now. He's
slow.

MARGO

How slow?

OWEN

Slow.

MARGO

Harlan?

OWEN

Four miles.

DALE

(from the back)

Margo.

MARGO

I see it.

DALE

He's got a taxiing single engine on the
runway and a jet at four miles.

MARGO

I know what he's got, Dale. Owen. What's the
call?

OWEN's hand is on the switch. It does not move.

OWEN

He'll clear. He'll clear in time.

MARGO

Will he?

OWEN

He...

MARGO

Owen. You don't get to hope. What's the call?

Nothing. OWEN stares at the runway.

DALE

That's it. I'm plugging in.

MARGO

No.

DALE

Margo, that's not a request.

MARGO

If you key up now he's done. He's done, Dale. He'll never sit here again and you know it.

DALE

Better than the alternative.

MARGO

(to Owen, fast, low)

Owen. Send him around. Say the words. You know the words.

OWEN

(barely)

Harlan two twenty...

MARGO

Louder.

OWEN

Harlan two twenty, go around. Fly runway heading, climb and maintain three thousand.

Beat. OWEN listens.

OWEN

He's going around.

MARGO

Say it to me.

OWEN

Harlan two twenty is going around, runway heading, three thousand.

MARGO

Good. Breathe. Now what's the next problem?

OWEN

The... Cutter nine one is in position.

MARGO

And?

OWEN

And Harlan's going to fly right over him on runway heading.

MARGO

And Cutter's departure is?

OWEN

Runway heading. Same heading. Three thousand.

MARGO

So?

OWEN

Cutter nine one, tower, cancel takeoff clearance, hold in position. Traffic on the go-around overhead.

Pause.

OWEN

He's holding.

DALE

Turn Harlan. You got a departure stacking up behind Cutter.

MARGO

He'll turn Harlan when Harlan has five hundred feet under him.

DALE

He's got it now.

MARGO

(to Owen)

Does he?

OWEN

(checking)

Six hundred. Harlan two twenty, turn left heading two four zero, contact departure.

He listens.

OWEN

Two four zero, departure, Harlan two twenty. He's gone.

MARGO

And four four kilo?

OWEN

Tango four four kilo, tower, you are clear of the runway. Taxi to the ramp via Charlie. And four four kilo, when you're parked, I need you to call the tower.

He lets go of the switch. His hand is shaking.

MARGO

Cutter.

OWEN

Cutter nine one, runway two seven, cleared for takeoff.

He leans back. The room breathes.

LENA

(quietly, from ground)

Nice.

DALE

(coming forward)

That was close.

MARGO

It was a go-around. We do four a week.

DALE

He froze.

MARGO

For six seconds. And then he didn't.

DALE

I'm noting the six seconds.

MARGO

Note them. Note that I didn't key up, and note that you didn't either. And note that he caught the departure conflict on his own, because I didn't give him that one.

DALE looks at her. Then at OWEN. He goes back to his desk.

MARGO

(to Owen)

Give me the position. Lena, he's off.

OWEN

I can finish the shift.

MARGO

I know you can. That's why you're off. You come back tomorrow and you do it again, and you do it before I have to ask you twice. You hear me?

OWEN

(unplugging)

Yes ma'am.

He stands. His legs are unsteady. MARGO sits, plugs in, scans the scope.

MARGO

(into the headset)

Harlan three fifteen, tower, wind two six zero at nine, runway two seven, cleared to land.

She glances up at the rain. Lights fade.

END OF SCRIPT