

## Flying Blind



The red phone rings at 22:04 hours. State Trooper Ed Kierzwinski blinks and rubs his eyes. He spent the last twenty minutes staring into the radar monitor's screen, and now its ghostly green circle burns the inside of his eyelids.

He was watching this beautiful night turn to soup. One low bank of clouds moved in from Indianapolis. The other swept north from Louisville, drawing strength from the Ohio River like a man drinks a milkshake from a straw. The two storms met at New Lebanon and spread east over Dayton, gathering strength as they approached the Ohio State Patrol helicopter hangar at Wright Patterson Air Force Base.

Picking up the red receiver, Kierzwinski hears the first raindrops hit the hangar roof. As visibility drops to 800 feet, he knows the next phone call will be from the air traffic control tower in Dayton, grounding his helicopter for the night. "State Patrol," he says, trying harder than usual to sound bored.

The 911 operator is new, Kierzwinski knows, but she is efficient and well-trained. Car crash three miles north of Urbana on State Route 68. Two females, both in critical condition. Request transport to Columbus Children's Hospital. Does State Patrol accept the mission?

To stall, Kierzwinski takes a breath. Air Trooper 1 is a Bell 429 helicopter. Flat-out, it can make it to Urbana in nine minutes. He'd fly north-by-northeast, maybe a quarter-mile ahead of the storm's face. Best case: He lands, loads the patients and takes off before the rain really hits.

Worst case: The storm overtakes him. He'd be stuck trying to land an underpowered aircraft on a two-lane highway in heavy wind and rain, with no radar and no lights.

Kierzwinski flips the question around. Most crash victims near Urbana go to the closest hospital, that cramped emergency room at Springfield Regional. If these girls need transport all the way to the Level I trauma center, 45 miles away at Columbus Children's, they must be 16 years old, maybe 17. And they're in pretty bad shape.

Beside the phone, the flight radio squawks with static.

"Roger Dayton Tower, this is Air Medical Three. We are leaving Springfield Regional. Flying to base in Tipp City. Over."

Kierzwinski knows that voice. It's Dale Domer, a pilot who hired onto Air Medical when the private company opened its first base two years ago. Between his fake Southern accent and his coltish arrogance with a helicopter, Domer was a perfect hire for the guys who own Air Medical, whom Kierzwinski secretly considers a couple of halfwit cowboys.

"Well if they can fly in this stuff, we sure can," Kierzwinski says before dropping the red receiver back in its cradle.

Six minutes later, the rotors of Air Trooper 1 are spinning. The two flight nurses, Sam Shifton and Ariel Gupta, wipe raindrops from their foreheads as they cinch down their shoulder belts. Kierzwinski pulls the throttle grip towards his knee and the steering stick into his lap, and the helicopter jumps off the tarmac.

He veers east to outrun the rain. Kierzwinski takes a left turn, aims his nose for Urbana, and looks up to see the full moon streaming in through the windscreen and lighting up the cockpit. He chuckles. If he were in his car, he'd flip the sun visor down.

To the left he sees the moonlight bouncing off the storm wall. He thinks: That thing just got bigger. It's six thousand feet tall now, with high winds pushing a knot of cloud forward from the main front like a boxer throwing a punch.

Kierzwinski pulls the throttle. The Bell's nose dips, and the helicopter shudders as it reaches 178 miles an hour, its maximum speed. Urbana comes into view. Kierzwinski uses the lights of Main Street to fly right up the town's spine. Looking left he sees the lights from the car lots on the West side of town become engulfed by the storm, turning the bellies of the clouds orange.

“When we land, you guys are gonna have to MOVE,” Kierzwinski shouts to the nurses in back.

Finally he sees the ambulance. Kierzwinski climbs, slows, brings his tail round 180 degrees and drops his skids in the middle of the road. Gupta shoves the sliding door aside. The ambulance crew pushes one gurney forward. Together they lift the victim into the helicopter.

“Where’s the other one?” Kierzwinski asks.

“She didn’t make it,” the paramedic yells back.

Kierzwinski nods. The nurses fumble with the straps as they tie the gurney to the helicopter floor, which is jumping like a wild horse. “We’ve got wind!” Kierzwinski says. “Let’s go! Let’s go!”

The nurses take their seats and Kierzwinski lifts off. The helicopter climbs, but slowly, fighting the storm. Kierzwinski thinks: I’m lifting, I’m lifting, we’re gonna make it.

He sees the power line at the last possible moment. With the storm to his back he cannot climb any faster, and he cannot stop. He feels the impact before he hears it, and he knows he has hooked the power line with his skids. As Trooper 1 loses speed, time slows down. Kierzwinski pulls the stick with all his strength, hoping to break the line. The helicopter is temporarily suspended, roaring at full throttle but motionless in the sky. The radio comes to life.

“This is Dayton Tower. Please be advised that all air traffic is suspended until further—”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who is Ed Kierzwinski?

- A a 911 operator
- B a helicopter pilot hired by Air Medical
- C a State Trooper helicopter pilot
- D a car accident victim

2. Which of the following best describes the setting of the story?

- A It is early evening in the state of Ohio at a hospital.
- B It is mid-afternoon in the state of Ohio during a nice, sunny day.
- C It is night in the state of Ohio as a storm gets stronger.
- D It is night in the state of Ohio as a storm clears.

3. Which of the following statements most strongly supports the conclusion that Kierzwinski did not think Dale Domer was an excellent helicopter pilot?

- A Dale Domer is flying to the base in Tipp City during the storm.
- B Domer had a fake Southern accent and coltish arrogance.
- C Dale Domer is a pilot who hired onto Air Medical when the private company opened its first base two years ago.
- D Domer was a perfect hire for the guys who own Air Medical, whom Kierzwinski secretly considers a couple of halfwit cowboys.

4. When Kierzwinski hears that Domer and his crew are flying their helicopter in the stormy weather, Kierzwinski says, "Well if they can fly in this stuff, we sure can."

Based on this statement what is the best description of the relationship between Kierzwinski and Domer?

- A respectful
- B competitive
- C full of hate
- D friendly

5. What is this story mainly about?

- A what happens when State Trooper Kierzwinski responds to an accident during a dangerous storm
- B why Ed Kierzwinski dislikes Dale Domer and the guys who own Air Medical
- C the advantages of operating a helicopter in good weather conditions
- D what happens when there is tension between two helicopter pilots who are hired at different companies

6. The author ends the story with the following sentence: "This is Dayton Tower. Please be advised that all air traffic is suspended until further—"

By using this style of ending the author wants to leave the reader in

- A tears
- B suspense
- C anger
- D a satisfied mood

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Kierzwinski does not see the power line until the last possible moment; \_\_\_\_\_ he ends up hooking the power line with his helicopter skids.

- A because
- B therefore
- C however
- D but

8. Near the end of the story the author writes, "Kierzwinski thinks: I'm lifting, I'm lifting, we're gonna make it."

Explain whether Kierzwinski was correct about what was going to happen.

---

---

---

---

9. Explain whether the reader knows for certain what happened to Kierzwinski and his passengers. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

---

---

---

---

---

10. Explain the reasons why State Trooper Kierzwinski accepted the mission to fly, even though the weather was getting worse.

---

---

---

---

---

## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 940

**Passage Summary:** In "Flying Blind," the author tells the story of State Trooper Ed Kierzwinski, who receives a call from a 911 operator during a storm. The main character, Kierzwinski, must decide whether to take his helicopter into the storm to pick up two car crash victims. Kierzwinski decides to fly the helicopter through the storm.

1. Who is Ed Kierzwinski?

- A a 911 operator
- B a helicopter pilot hired by Air Medical
- C a State Trooper helicopter pilot**
- D a car accident victim

2. Which of the following best describes the setting of the story?

- A It is early evening in the state of Ohio at a hospital.
- B It is mid-afternoon in the state of Ohio during a nice, sunny day.
- C It is night in the state of Ohio as a storm gets stronger.**
- D It is night in the state of Ohio as a storm clears.

3. Which of the following statements most strongly supports the conclusion that Kierzwinski did not think Dale Domer was an excellent helicopter pilot?

- A Dale Domer is flying to the base in Tipp City during the storm.
- B Domer had a fake Southern accent and coltish arrogance.
- C Dale Domer is a pilot who hired onto Air Medical when the private company opened its first base two years ago.
- D Domer was a perfect hire for the guys who own Air Medical, whom Kierzwinski secretly considers a couple of halfwit cowboys.**

4. When Kierzwinski hears that Domer and his crew are flying their helicopter in the stormy weather, Kierzwinski says, "Well if they can fly in this stuff, we sure can."

Based on this statement what is the best description of the relationship between Kierzwinski and Domer?

- A respectful
- B competitive**
- C full of hate
- D friendly

5. What is this story mainly about?

- A what happens when State Trooper Kierzwinski responds to an accident during a dangerous storm**
- B why Ed Kierzwinski dislikes Dale Domer and the guys who own Air Medical
- C the advantages of operating a helicopter in good weather conditions
- D what happens when there is tension between two helicopter pilots who are hired at different companies

6. The author ends the story with the following sentence: "This is Dayton Tower. Please be advised that all air traffic is suspended until further—"

By using this style of ending the author wants to leave the reader in

- A tears
- B suspense**
- C anger
- D a satisfied mood

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Kierzwinski does not see the power line until the last possible moment; \_\_\_\_\_ he ends up hooking the power line with his helicopter skids.

- A because
- B therefore**
- C however
- D but

8. Near the end of the story the author writes, "Kierzwinski thinks: I'm lifting, I'm lifting, we're gonna make it."

Explain whether Kierzwinski was correct about what was going to happen.

**Suggested answer: Answers may vary but could include:** He was not correct. The helicopter got caught on the power lines.

9. Explain whether the reader knows for certain what happened to Kierzwinski and his passengers. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

**Answers may vary and can include:**

- The reader knows that their helicopter crashed. The author writes that when the helicopter is motionless in the sky, the radio comes to life. But halfway through the sentence the sound from the radio is cut off. This proves that the helicopter crashed given the dangerous position it was in.
- The helicopter crashed but we don't know what happened to Kierzwinski and his passengers - whether they survived or not.
- It is unclear what happens at the end of the story, or whether Kierzwinski and his passengers were able to escape trouble. The air traffic controller making the announcement is cut off in the text, which indicates that the radio went out. This may have been due to bad reception in the storm or due to the fact that the helicopter crashed given the dangerous position it was in. The helicopter may or may not have recovered.

**10.** Explain the reasons why State Trooper Kierzwinski accepted the mission to fly, even though the weather was getting worse.

**Answers may vary and can include:**

Kierzwinski accepted the mission because

- he wanted to save the people injured in the car accident even if it put himself in danger.
- it was his job and responsibility to try and save the people.
- he drew the conclusion that the injured girls were young so he was especially concerned about helping them.
- he was competitive with Domer who was flying in the bad weather, and wanted to prove that he could fly in the bad weather too.
- the weather wasn't very bad yet and he thought he could return before the storm worsened.