



Harlan Films, LLC

Kill the Messenger

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Two clean-cut MEN IN SUITS - Agents of some sort, Federal - at a pane of observation glass.

Beyond the glass, in the refrigeration room, a MORGUE ATTENDANT opens a refrigerator door, reaches for the steel slab. With the Attendant, a WOMAN and YOUNG MAN: SUE WEBB, 40, blond, pretty; her son, IAN, 22.

MORGUE ATTENDANT

You sure about the boy?

IAN

I need to see--

Attendant peels back the sheet. On the slab, the body of GARY WEBB: 42, ash blond, handsome, masculine. Two bullet wounds behind the left ear.

SUE

(gasps)

Goddammit.

MORGUE ATTENDANT

I believed him. My whole family believed him. Everyone I know. For what that's worth. I'm so very sorry.

Beyond the observation glass. The Agents craning to see.

AGENT #1

Yeah that's Webb. That the wife?

AGENT #2

Probably. And oldest kid.
(checks his notebook)

Ian.

AGENT #1

Can someone actually shoot himself twice in the head?

They contemplate that.

AGENT #2

I knew a guy once who shot himself in the heart twice. I guess you gotta really wanna die.

AGENT #1
 Report says suicide.
 (then)
 As long as it's him.

Ian touches Webb's face. The Attendant returns to the body to the dark. And the three of them file out to the waiting room. Agents trying not to engage. But Ian turning--

IAN
 Wait, who are they--?
 (figuring it out; raging)
 Get the hell outta here!

MORGUE ATTENDANT
 Excuse me?

IAN
 (pointing at the agents)
 Get them the hell out!

Sue wraps up her son. Turns her glare on the Agents.

SUE
 Just please leave. You've done
 enough--

The Agents nodding, leaving. Sue looking past them at the glass doors to the outer world. Sun. Air. Future.

SUE (CONT'D)
 (breaths, ready)
 Okay.
 (grabs her boy tighter;
 kissing the back of his
 head)
 It's gonna be okay. It has to be
 okay--

NOW UNDER AND THROUGH OPENING CREDITS, we SHUFFLE through a kaleidoscope of jump cut images and footage from the War on Drugs, both familiar and distant--

2

(2-10) STOCK FOOTAGE

2

TO PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON opening the "War on Drugs"...

PRESIDENT NIXON/FOOTAGE
 Drugs are public enemy number one--

TO NANCY REAGAN delivering her "Just Say No" speech...

TO DEA AGENTS SEIZING a mountain of hundred-dollar bills...

TO PABLO ESCOBAR in jungle fatigues, next to a plane loading hundreds of pearlescent white bricks...

PRESIDENT REAGAN/FOOTAGE (OVER)

...These twin evils - narcotics and terrorism - represent the most insidious and dangerous threats to the hemisphere today.

TO A ROCK HOUSE IN THE NICKERSON GARDENS PROJECTS, WATTS, LA ... detritus and urban decay ... Powder cooked into rocks by MOTHERS, their KIDS playing with the vials around their feet.

TO A LINE OF JUNKIE MOTHERS wrapping the rock house...

TO LAPD GANG UNITS - helmets and truncheons - bracing a wallful of corner hooks, look-outs and pimps.

TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN CORPSES - women, children trapped in cross-fire - lying akimbo in an LA playground.

TO WATTS ON FIRE ... blocks of flames ... urban warfare.

11 **EXT. FAUX SPANISH MANSION - MISSION VIEJO, CA - SIMULTANEOUS**11

TITLE: JULY 15, 1995

A MAN walks up to the door: 37, longish ash-blond hair, ruddy handsome. Notebook in back pocket. GARY WEBB. Vibrant. Alive.

Door opens on RONNY QUAIL, 40, nose collapsed from a lifetime of blow. LITTLE HOTTIE, 19, stark naked, in tow.

QUAIL

Who the fuck are you?

WEBB

Gary Webb. San Jose Mercury-News.

QUAIL

What do you want?

WEBB

You called me, remember? Story on government seizure of property of, uh, accused narcotics dealers--

QUAIL
 (hands over heart)
 Yeah yeah that's me. The accused
 ... c'mon in...

12

INT. FAUX SPANISH MANSION

12

Quail walks Webb in. No furniture. Webb sniffs. Cleaning and paint equipment piled in the corner.

WEBB
 This the house they're taking?

QUAIL
 I remain optimistic.

WEBB
 (checks his notebook)
 You said you were charged with
 conspiracy--

Something's off. The light. Nothing's coming through the windows. Because they're all covered in tin foil.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 What's with the foil?

QUAIL
 Signals, man. Blocks microwave and
 radio.

The girl rolls her eyes and - naked - crosses to the coffee machine. Webb can't stop looking at the girl's ass.

QUAIL (CONT'D)
 But what they don't seem to get is
 they can't get me--

Webb takes in the girl. All of her fantastic body.

QUAIL (CONT'D)
 What the hell're you doing?

Webb displays his left hand. A shiny ring.

WEBB
 Relax. Married.

QUAIL
 So what. So am I.

A13

INT. FAUX SPANISH MANSION - KITCHEN - TIME JUMP

A13

They've been talking maybe for an hour. Quail painstakingly prepares coffee. Freshly ground. French press.

QUAIL

My last house - this sweet pad in
Laguna - charges didn't stick and
they still didn't give it back--

OVER SCENE, a LOUD sharp sound. As if the DOOR was knocked down. Webb whirling as --

-- COPS, AGENTS, SHERIFFS pour around the corner, into the room, pointing weapons --

COPS/AGENTS/SHERIFFS

D.E.A.! ... Los Angeles Sheriff
Department! ... Do not move!

QUAIL

Christ. Here we go again.

The girl screams and runs.

COPS/AGENTS/SHERIFFS

Get that bitch!! ... Down
motherfuckers, down!!

A dozen AGENTS fan out. Quail gives Webb a funny smile.

QUAIL

We'll have to have that coffee
another time--

Webb drifting backward toward the door, hands up: What, me?

SHERIFF 1

Ronald J. Quail, we have a warrant
for your arrest for distribution of
cocaine, wire fraud--

SHERIFF 1 (CONT'D)

(to Webb)

Who the fuck are you!?
(muzzle against Webb's
temple)

WEBB

Hold on --

EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT., SACRAMENTO - LATER THAT DAY 14

A local HOCKEY CREW - post game - and WIVES around Webb's pool. Still in their jerseys. Webb at the grill, knuckles raw, upper lip smeared with dried blood.

And there's Ian, now 16. Spitting image of the old man. In a Jersey, too. And Sue - now 34, with their other two kids, ERIC, 12; and CHRISTINE, 9. AC/DC playing in the b.g.

DAVE

(laughing at Webb's face)
You are the picture of graceless
and out-of-control, a danger to
your kind.

BOB

The guy just had a shotgun in his
ear. Give him a break.

(to Webb)

So how'd that feel?

WEBB

Cold--

DAVE

That smuggler dude looked nasty.

SUE

(from across the yard;
always listening)
But I hear the hooker - I'm sorry -
the girlfriend was classy. She old
enough to drive, Gary?

WEBB

Think she was, yeah--

BOB

Man, I wish I had your life.

SUE

Cuz you want to be married to me?

BOB

Cuz Gary's my idol. And yeah--
(glancing at his own wife)
That thing about you. You're a rock
star, too--

SUE

Uh huh--

Dave puts a beer in Ian's hand.

SUE (CONT'D)
Your son is sixteen, Gary! Just
f.y.i.--

WEBB
C'mon, check this, fellas.
(leads them to--)

15

INT./EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

15

There's Webb's Honda Interceptor, hottest of motorcycles. And an old wheezy Triumph. In need of love and spare parts.

IAN
Awwright, Dad!

WEBB
We'll rebuild it together.

Ian hugs Webb hard. Webb puts the kid in a headlock.

WEBB (CONT'D)
Infant day before yesterday.

Sue sticks her head in. Phone in hand.

SUE
Hey. Yeah you. Hotshot.
(face falls at the sight
of the second bike)
Goddammit we talked about this!

WEBB
I changed our mind. It's a two-year
project. Minimum.

Webb tangos across the garage. Sue warding him off.

WEBB (CONT'D)
I've waited for this, you know? The
perfect ride. S'been sitting up
here in my head for fourteen years.
My boy and me riding to the
mountaintops and touching the sky.
Then I watch him, my kid, head over
the horizon.

BOB
God, that's beautiful.

SUE
Shut up, Bob.
(to Ian)
You ready for all that, Ian? To be
full of shit like your dad?

IAN
Yeah. I wanna ride to the hills and-

SUE
Touch the sky. I know.
(she grabs Webb's nuts)
Something happens to my kid on that
thing I'll cut these off while
you're sleeping.

DAVE
(toasts with a pint of
motor oil)
And here's to the happy
couple! Ain't life grand!

BOB
I thought you already cut
them off.

*
*

Sue hands him Webb phone. Whoever was on the other end heard
the whole thing.

SUE (CONT'D)
It's the paper.

16 **INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

16

Reporter's lair, quasi-organized chaos of boxes and files. A
slew of journalism awards, including a Pulitzer. Framed
stories from the *Kentucky Post* and *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*.

Dirty aquarium gurgles in the corner. Poster hangs over it:
"If it's in the *Kentucky Post*, it's the truth".

17 **INT. NEWSROOM - SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS - SAN JOSE - CONTINUOUS**

INTERCUT DAWN GARCIA in the sprawling newsroom of the San
Jose Mercury-News. Editor, pretty, 35, harried, unmarried.
Alone with the weekend skeleton crew.

WEBB
(sits at his computer)
Is it up?

DAWN
Goes to press in ten.

Webb opens email. Brings up galleys for a newspaper piece.

WEBB
Where's the last graph, Dawn?

DAWN
We ran out of inches.

WEBB
Cut the kicker you blow the whole point. The government takes away these people's shit, their houses, their cars, *forever - before* they're convicted.
(silence)
Even if they're acquitted they don't get it back.

DAWN
They're drug dealers, Gary.

WEBB
Not until they're convicted. Because this is America. *That's* the story.
(contemplating the fish in the aquarium)
You know our job is printing stuff that's true, right? And if it's worth caring about the readers care. If it's not they don't. Either way, we don't control outcomes.

DAWN
Four minutes.

WEBB
Take my name off the story.

DAWN
(after a silence)
They were right about you.

WEBB
What part?

DAWN
You're an asshole.

WEBB

Yes I am an asshole. About this.
They were also right about you.

DAWN

What part?

WEBB

First generation American, chip on
her shoulder, ambitious, trying to
make her immigrant parents proud.

Click. She hangs up.

18 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - IAN'S BEDROOM - LIESEL CT. - NEXT MORNING**8

6.30am. Ian wakes, TRACK HIM stumbling down the hall in
underwear, exchanging sleepy salutes with Sue, who's guiding
Christine to the bathroom. And downstairs, past the couch--

Where Webb is sleeping, clothed. Ian toes at him. And heads
to the front door. Picks the *Mercury-News* off the stoop.

IAN

Dad.

(Webb grunts)

You ever gonna go back to your
room?

WEBB

Ask your mother.

SUE

None of your business. Gary, it's
none of his business.

(to Ian)

Your dad's in the doghouse as long
as I say he is and you will be too
if you're late for school.

19 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

19

Sue starts doing eight things at once, kids' lunch,
breakfast, dishes. Webb tries to help but mostly in the way.

IAN

(reading Webb's story;
island of calm)

(MORE)

FARRAGHER

Yo. I know how bad you wanna do the Guv today. Real reporter work.

WEBB

(grabbing a stack of pink
'While-you-were-outs')
How that crap gives you
satisfaction I'll never know.

FARRAGHER

Meat and potatoes, King Shit.
Someone's gotta do it.
(then)
Hey, Fancy. That story this
morning. That was a big one, son.

WEBB

But not the "Big One".

FAR

Curious. Does the Big One have a
sound? Does it go 'woosh'?

WEBB

It's like a bullet with your name
on it. You never hear it coming.

They look up. A young kid in his 20's is in the doorway.

RICH KLINE

Rich Kline. I just started at the
L.A. Times, next door.

WEBB

Gary Webb.

RICH KLINE

Yeah I know. Great story. My
editor's pissed we missed it.

WEBB

Good.

RICH KLINE

Any advice?

WEBB

Don't let the assholes win.
(his phone rings)
Gotta go, kid.

23

INT. WEBB'S OFFICE - MERC BUREAU - SACRAMENTO - SAME

23

The room a wreck of controlled chaos. Webb shuffling through the while-you-were-outs. Three from a "CORAL BACA".

WEBB

(calls out there)

Who the hell is Coral Baca and why does she keep calling me--?

(dialing; into phone)

This is Gary Webb.

CORAL/PHONE

He finally calls.

Her accent Latina. Sultry.

CORAL/PHONE (CONT'D)

I like your work.

WEBB

You follow my work?

CORAL/PHONE

I do now.

WEBB

What can I do for you?

CORAL/PHONE

It's what I can do for you.

WEBB

Okay, what can you do for me?

CORAL/PHONE

Your story today. I thought you might be interested in a follow-up.

WEBB

You called me five times this morning for a follow-up?

CORAL/PHONE

Three times. I'm a woman. And I wanted something.

(then)

My boyfriend Raffie's in prison for cocaine trafficking. That's Rafael Cor-ne-jo.

WEBB
 (starts doodling)
 Colombian?

CORAL/PHONE
 Nicaraguan.

Absentmindedly scrawling "Cornejo". Doodling around it.

CORAL/PHONE (CONT'D)
 He has this gorgeous house the
 government just took. Twenty-
 thousand-dollar Italian couch I
 designed myself. Handmade
 wallpaper. Good story, no?

WEBB
 Yeah. I just wrote it.

CORAL/PHONE
 Raffie's story is different. He
 sold drugs for the government.

WEBB
 (pencil freezes)
 Can you say that again?

CORAL/PHONE
 He brought four tons of cocaine
 into the country. For the
government.

Webb scrawls a big question mark, underlines it, circles it.
 Stares at it -- nah -- finally scrawls a thick X over it.

WEBB
 That's, um, a little--

CORAL/PHONE
 Crazy?

WEBB
 That'll work.

CORAL/PHONE
 You think I'm one of those
 conspiracy nut jobs, don'tcha?

WEBB
 You have a nice voice, Coral.
 Thanks for calling.
 (about to hang up--)

CORAL/PHONE

What if I can prove everything?
I've copied every piece of paper.
(Webb's hand pauses)
Selling drugs for the government.
Have you written *that* story?

WEBB

No.

CORAL/PHONE

Then maybe you should buy me lunch.

24

INT. DINER - SACRAMENTO - DAY

24

Odd hour of day, between meals. Mostly empty.

CORAL (O.S.)

You must be Gary.

He turns. She's all cleavage and bejeweled fingers. Mid-20's.
Raven hair, long legs, short skirt. The five-course meal.

WEBB

And you're Coral.
(they shake)
How about those documents?

He sits. She reaches across, fingers the end of his hair.

CORAL

What, no foreplay?

Gary does not look at her tits.

WEBB

No.

Coral brings documents out of a briefcase: "*CONFIDENTIAL -
PROPERTY OF US GOVT - MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED*".

CORAL

This is the thing you need to see.

WEBB

Wait. Wow.

IN TIGHT: "*GRAND JURY FOR NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA,
TRANSCRIPT OF GRAND JURY TESTIMONY OF DANILO BLANDON*".

WEBB (CONT'D)

Fuck me. A grand jury transcript?
In fifteen years I've maybe seen
one. How'd you get it?

CORAL

The government turned it over on
discovery by mistake. Franklin
Smith.

WEBB

The Federal *prosecutor* Franklin
Smith?

CORAL

That little bitch. I called the
cops on him once.

WEBB

You called the cops on the Feds?

CORAL

His goons were sneaking around my
house. Could have been rapists.
(she smiles, and--)

WEBB

I think I'm gonna like you, Coral.
(wants to concentrate)
Give me a minute--

Not looking at her tits. Bent over the transcript, rapt.

WEBB (CONT'D)

You read all this?

CORAL

A little.

WEBB

What's this they keep blacking out?

TRANSCRIPT: lots of redactions with thick black marker.

Coral gets out of her booth, slides into Gary's booth next to
him. She leans in, reaching into the pile of papers. Breasts
flowing. Touching.

CORAL

'Danilo Blandon'. That's
who deals for the government.
(Webb reading)
(MORE)

CORAL (CONT'D)
 He was a friend. He played with my
 kid. Then he rats. Weirds me out.

WEBB
 (reading on)
 Government payroll. Selling dope.
 And ... lots of it.

She points again: "*Norwin Meneses*".

CORAL
 Blandon's boss. Norwin Meneses.
 He's probably the biggest
 trafficker in the whole country.

WEBB
 They couldn't be that stupid.

CORAL
 Oh but they are. The biggest dope
 dealers in the country. Way way
 bigger than Raffie. Why use whale
 to catch catfish? That make sense
 to you, Gary Webb?

WEBB
 Not very much sense no. What other
 documents do you have?

She smells great. The tits are great. Webb's not gonna look.

CORAL
 Everything is at my house --

He's not gonna look at her tits.

CORAL (CONT'D)
 You wanna come over?
 (he looks; fuck)
 You want to make those part of the
 deal?

WEBB
 Just send the documents to my
 office.

CORAL
 First things first, Gary Webb.
 Raffie's got court tomorrow. Be
 there.

WEBB

Gary Webb, San Jose Mercury-News.

Smith shakes, re-zips, steps to the sinks.

SMITH

You always follow people into
bathrooms?

WEBB

No.

SMITH

Why's local news interested in this
case?

WEBB

I'm not. But I *am* interested in
Danilo Blandon.

SMITH

Never heard of him.

WEBB

Then why's he on your witness list?

WEBB'S POV TIGHTENS on Smith's face in the mirror. Eyes like
cameras, notes every detail, tic at the mouth; missed a spot
with the razor. Professional surveillance--

WEBB (CONT'D)

I have his grand jury transcript.
(Smith looks at him)
Yep. I've seen screw-ups outta you
guys, but that's a big one.

Smith stares at him. Then exits.

27

EXT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE STEPS - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

27

FROM AFAR -- As is if they're being watched -- Webb and Coral
on the courthouse steps. They're exchanging information. He
shakes her hand. We follow Webb to a PARKING GARAGE --

A28

INT. COURTHOUSE GARAGE/WEBB'S CAR - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

A28

--Webb gets into his car. As he reaches for the ignition--

A hard knock on the passenger side glass. Smith. Standing there. Webb reaches and opens the door. Smith gets in. Sour look on his face.

SMITH

You really think dope dealers deserve to hang onto the crap they buy with money they make off thirteen-year-old junkies?

WEBB

Is that what you wanted to talk about?

SMITH

No.

(then)

Tell me how this works. For real. She fucking you? You think she wouldn't fuck me if I let her scumbag boyfriend go?

WEBB

That's not how it works.

Webb looks at him. Smith is actually sweating. A spongy moistness across his forehead. Webb smells the bruise--

WEBB (CONT'D)

So you have Danilo Bandon cold on what looks like major narcotics and laundering. Then just let him walk. Why's this guy showing up on witness lists? Why isn't he in a dungeon somewhere?

SMITH

I hate you fucking people.

Stop. Webb realizing, dawning on him--

WEBB

Maybe you're afraid of him. Does he have something on the Federal government?

SMITH

You believe in redemption, Webb?

WEBB

Only when I have to.

SMITH

What will it take to keep Blandon out of your paper? I'll give you any other story, any one you want.

WEBB

You're making me wanna know what I'd be giving up.

SMITH

This is about being a good American. Do you know what it means to be a good American?

WEBB

Truth and justice.

SMITH

Where did you grow up?

WEBB

Indiana.

SMITH

On a farm?

(Webb nods)

With animals?

(Webb nods)

Jesus. Is that really true?

WEBB

Everything except the animals.

SMITH

Well, there are more important things than the truth, even in Indiana.

(beat; then)

Even in Cleveland.

STOP. Webb stiffens and that word. *Cleveland*.

WEBB

(angry)

We're done.

SMITH

Good. Get the fuck out.

WEBB

It's my car.

Right. Smith gets out.

WEBB (CONT'D)
I'm not going away. I'm a reality.
Bandon's a reality.

SMITH
Reality's classified!

DAWN (PRE-LAP)
He really said "reality's
classified"? He know he was on the
record?

WEBB (PRE-LAP)
I guess he forgot.

28

EXT. ROOFTOP - MERC BUREAU - SACRAMENTO - DAY

28

"Smoking section". Where the reporter delinquents gather.
Scatterings of cigs and ash.

Dawn and Webb having a ritual smoke. Bandon grand jury
transcript in her hands.

DAWN
(nonplussed)
So what's the story? Paranoid
Justice official off his meds? Feds
use bad guy to catch other bad
guys? It's low-hanging fruit, Gary.

WEBB
You have no idea what that is, do
you?
(the transcript)

DAWN
I know what it is.

WEBB
Well, it's unheard of. It's a gift.
(and)
I asked around about Bandon. No
one's heard of him. Why is that?

Farragher sticks his head out the service door.

DAWN
Talking here--

Farragher bows ... "Sorry, chief" ... backs out. Dawn waves the transcript. Unconvinced.

WEBB

I've just never seen a suit like that so desperate.

DAWN

Define desperate.

WEBB

He brought up Cleveland.

DAWN

He threatened you?

WEBB

That's what I'm telling you. I'm a nobody. But he got himself educated in a minute flat. Whatever I got near, it made him freakin nervous.

She's thinking about it. Hesitant.

WEBB (CONT'D)

I know what I saw. I've been doing this a long time.

DAWN

Don't do old-and-wise. I hate that.

WEBB

I'm not old.

DAWN

And we're not the LA Times.

WEBB

We're not small-time either.

DAWN

Get Blandon and see if it's anywhere worth going.
(and she's up and out)

29

INT. FOYER/KITCHEN - WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - EVENING

29

Later that evening, Gary enters the house. He throws his keys down in the foyer, walks into the kitchen.

He stops at the sight of a banker's box -- "FOR GARY" in big loopy feminine script sitting like a turkey in the middle of the table. The kids around it eating fish sticks. Sue puts some more plates on the table.

ERIC
Who's Coral?

WEBB
Shit.

IAN
She's hot.

SUE
She came into my house.

IAN
She drove a Camaro.

WEBB
Of course she did.

SUE
Why does she know where you live?

WEBB
I don't know why. She's a source.

SUE
For a story about strippers?

WEBB
Drug dealers.

SUE
Oh. Much better.
(then)
Is it happening again, Gary?

ERIC
Is what happening again?

Webb grabs Sue by the arm and pulls her out of the kitchen --

30

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - BEDROOM

30

Sue sitting on the bed. Webb standing. We're mid-scene.

SUE
So Guatemalan drug dealers and guys
in suits?

WEBB
Nicaraguan drug dealers.

SUE
Still. Fuck you for giving that
tramp our address.

WEBB
I didn't.

He pulls her in. She lets him.

WEBB (CONT'D)
We had an agreement. We're turning
a new leaf. You get to look in all
the drawers and closets now. Isn't
that what we said?

SUE
What happened with that woman?

WEBB
Nothing.

SUE
What happened with that woman?

WEBB
Nothing.

She grabs him by the arms.

SUE
Better not.
(then)
Don't let's do all that again. It's
why we left my family, my friends,
moved out to California, which I
fucking hate, f.y.i, all this
stupid sunshine and happy shiny
faces. To start over. Yes?

WEBB
New day. New leaf. A Gary and Sue
Webb sunrise. Yes.

SUE
I'm serious.

WEBB

So am I.

SUE

And you believe that woman?

WEBB

I don't need to. I just need what's
in that box, Sue.

Sue looking at him. *Watching* him. Then--

SUE

Sometimes I look at you and think
you're just a little boy, amazed by
how bad the world can be. You think
one day you can just be here, be
still?

WEBB

I'm not gonna fuck this up, baby.

She grabs Webb's hair. Pulls it. Hard.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Ow.

SUE

You better not. Because you're the
love of my goddamn life, and we
have a real shot. We can put this
back together. We can hold on.

She steers his face toward hers. Where she can see straight
into his eyes. Bores right into him.

SUE (CONT'D)

(tightens her grip;
pulling him closer--)
She said to tell you there's
another hearing tomorrow.

Now kisses him. Hard. And then releases him. And then simply
walks away.

31

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - LATER THAT NIGHT

31

A rectangle of light spills out of Webb's home office. Inside
is Webb, standing by a window.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Laying out the guts, rebuilding
them into something different.

IAN

Or something that doesn't make
sense.

WEBB

Or something even better. C'mere--

(pulls them ten feet back)

Squint--

(they both squint)

You see? Electrical stuff over
there, fuel stuff there, the hub
and ball bearings. Let it be messy,
but it comes together.

(embraces his son from
behind)

There's order to the universe.
Sometimes you just have to wait for
it to appear.

IAN

What if you're missing parts?

WEBB

Find new parts. Hunt the stuff
you're missing.

IAN

You're pretty confident.

WEBB

I never met a bike I couldn't fix.

IAN

What if all the king's horses, and
all the king's men, can't put
Humpty Dumpty back together again?

WEBB

When did you get so smart?

(then)

So. Then. Even if you can't put it
back together. At least you knew
what was inside. At least there are
no secrets.

IAN

I didn't know motorcycles had
secrets.

Webb puts a finger to his son's chest.

WEBB
Everything has a secret.

IAN
(ok fine, but)
I want to ride that bike, dad. I
want to ride it next to you.

WEBB
You will. Put it together. Figure
out how things work. How they
really work.

IAN
Just next time wait for me.

35 **INT. COURT ROOM - FEDERAL COURT HOUSE - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY** 35

Webb enters on Raphael Cornejo's trial. A half dozen FAMILY MEMBERS of defendants scattered.

Smith crossing toward the bench to sidebar with the judge. Clocks Webb's entrance. Scowls. Leans into judge.

Webb crosses to Coral in the front row. More cleavage, more jewelry, more wattage. She looks cheerful.

WEBB
What's going on?

Smith crosses back toward his table as--

JUDGE
Charges against Mr. Cornejo have
been dropped. You are free to go.

CORAL
Very impressive, Gary Webb.

WEBB
What just happened?

CORAL
You terrified them. They just
stuffed Danilo Blandon under a rug.
He's off the witness list. No
Blandon, no case. Raffie's walks.
(MORE)

CORAL (CONT'D)
 One day maybe I can thank you
 properly.
 (and starts to leave)

WEBB
 Wait a second--

And grabs for her arm. Cornejo glaring from across the room.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 Was this all about just springing
 him?

All of her smiles. Her face. Her gorgeous body.

CORAL
 I'm the bimbo, remember?
 (leans; whispers)
 Be happy, Gary Webb. You thought
 you were getting a piece of cheese.
 But I just gave you the mouse--

And nods toward Smith, who is leading a wedge of U.S.
 MARSHALS hustling out DANILO BLANDON, a well-tailored
 Nicaraguan in his 30's, aviator glasses, healthy, like he
 lives at a spa.

CORAL (CONT'D)
 There's your story. Danilo Blandon.

36

INT. WEBB'S OFFICE - MERC BUREAU - SACRAMENTO - NIGHT

36

Where Webb -- alone in the building -- is pouring over the
 documents Coral gave him. Been at it for hours. Surrounded by
 coffee cups, burger wrappers.

Above his desk, he's taping stuff up now. Articles from the
 L.A. Times on drugs. Mug shot of Blandon. Surveillance shot
 of Meneses. Then STOP. Something he's looking at. FBI report.

IN TIGHT: graph about the way Cornejo moved his cocaine. Got
 it from Blandon, then--

PUSH IN TIGHTER -- last page -- bottom -- "*Cornejo/Blandon
 distribution outlets*"--

Webb making a list of four or five names.

Now he's on the phone.

FENSTER
Alleged crack dealer.

WEBB
 (reads from a paper)
 'Freeway Ricky Ross. Biggest dealer
 in Los Angeles, the epicenter of
 the national crack epidemic--'
 (shows him the paper)
 L.A. Times.

FENSTER
 Who do you write for again?

WEBB
 San Jose Mercury-News.

FENSTER
 Never heard of it.

WEBB
 How's your case going?

FENSTER
 What do you actually want, Mr.-?

WEBB
 Gary Webb. Who's the Justice
 official on Ricky's case?

FENSTER
 That's public record. Franklin
 Smith.

WEBB
 What about Danilo Bandon? Heard of
 him?

FENSTER
 Maybe.

WEBB
 I think he's about to testify
 against your client.

FENSTER
 You have that backwards. Bandon is
 a friend and associate of my
 client. If he's going to testify
 it'll be for Ricky.

WEBB
 That would be awkward.

FENSTER
 Why?

*

WEBB

Because he's a government informant.

FENSTER

Well that's bullshit--

WEBB

Yeah okay except I have a Grand Jury transcript. Released on discovery. By mistake. By our Mr. Smith.

(Fenster leaning now)

In it is Blandon's drug distribution network. Distribution outlet number one is your client--

FENSTER

(almost explodes)

He's the informant?? Blandon?? Goddammit! Jesus does that make sense. If you only knew the horseshit Smith puts me through every time I ask who his secret weapon is.

WEBB

It's not just Ricky. He's testifying against a half dozen guys--

FENSTER

Fuck me. They block everything I ask, claiming - get this - national security.

WEBB

National security and crack cocaine in the same sentence. Does that not sound strange to you?

FENSTER

(interested now)

What do you really want?

40

INT. ENTRANCE - LA COUNTY JAIL - LOS ANGELES - DAY

40

They arrive at a hallway of interview rooms. Waiting inside one is a fit black man, 35, with a cropped beard and wide burning eyes: "FREEWAY" RICKY ROSS.

ROSS
Who's this cracker?

FENSTER
A reporter.

ROSS
Fuck you, Finster.

FENSTER
Fenster. You need to hear what he has to say.

WEBB
Gary Webb, San Jose Mercury-News.

ROSS
The what?

WEBB
It's in northern California.

ROSS
I know where San Jose is. Small time. Why would I talk to small time?

FENSTER
Have the conversation, Ricky.

WEBB
What do you know about Danilo Bandon?
(no reply, so--)
He smuggled cocaine into the United States and sold it to you.

ROSS
Don't know him.

Webb looks to Fenster. Fenster nods. Go ahead, so--

WEBB
Ricky, Danilo is testifying against you next week. He's the witness they're hiding.

Long beat. Ross seems not to have heard. Then he shoots up like something bit him in the ass.

GUARD (O.S.)
Sit the hell down in there!

ROSS
 (pissed)
 Hey, fuck you, man!

FENSTER
 Ricky, siddown.

ROSS
 There's no way they flipped Danilo.
 Man, that's one tough motherfucker.

WEBB
 They didn't flip anyone.

ROSS
 What's he talking about, Fenster?

FENSTER
 Fenster.

WEBB
 If I'm right, Danilo Bandon may
 have been working for the
 government the whole time.

Ross just looks at Webb. A long beat of stupefaction, then--

ROSS
 You for real?
 (to Fenster)
 He for real?
 (Webb nods; Fenster nods)
 Bandon a snitch? And me his bitch?
 (impressed; doing the
 mental telemetry)
 I am impressed. They say I sold
 dope all over, but man, Bandon a
thousand times heavier than I'll
 ever be. He's LA, he's New York,
 he's Atlanta. He's everywhere, man.

WEBB
 He's that big?

ROSS
 Big?? I couldn't sell it for him
 fast enough to keep up with supply.

WEBB
 You mean demand.

ROSS

No, motherfucker, I mean supply. He was throwing kilos at me under wholesale just to keep product moving. We wiped everyone out. I was buying a hundred kilos a week, selling three million dollars a day, and still couldn't get rid of all his inventory fast enough.

FENSTER

Allegedly, Ricky.

ROSS

It was raining cocaine! Allegedly, I gave that spic six million a week!

WEBB

That's impossible.

ROSS

Is it? Am I exaggerating, Fenster?

FENSTER

I hope so.

ROSS

That shit's real.

WEBB

How the hell do you move that much cocaine on the street--?

ROSS

Cocaine? You're not listening. I wasn't selling cocaine. I was cooking that shit. Cocaine is for white people. Crack's for the rest of us.

WEBB

It would have to be a monster operation.

ROSS

Is the U.S.-fucking-Mail a monster operation? Well, that's how big it was.

(and sits back--)

I was the best mailman there was. But I was still just a mailman--

WEBB

Jesus.

ROSS

And you're telling me Blandon's working for the government the whole time, working me from some beach on San Trope, and they put my ass in jail?? Man, I was the elf. Blandon was motherfucking Santa Claus.

41

EXT./INT. WEBB'S CAR - STREET CORNER - WATTS, LA - DAY
(POTENTIALLY INCLUDES STOCK FOOTAGE ELEMENTS)

41

Webb and Fenster sitting in Webb's car. McDonald's burgers sit unwrapped and untouched in their laps. Because--

Across the street, post-Apocalyptic urban blight: Nickerson Gardens housing project. Detritus and decay. Dope -- and its desolation -- everywhere. WHIP PAN to dope deals going down in the alleys. GANGBANGERS in hoodies and strung-out CUSTOMERS and GANG SOLDIERS and LOOKOUTS.

And a MOTHER hustles her small brood of INNOCENTS across the street as if through sniper's alley.

Back on Webb. Eyes scanning, taking it all in. Upset. All worse than he thought.

A GANG BANGER spots their car.

FENSTER

Maybe we should leave now.

WEBB

Five years ago, the Crips and Bloods carried knives and baseball bats. It was poor here, but it was a neighborhood. Families hung out together. Then yuppies started doing pills, slowed down on coke. The Colombians went back in the kitchen and figured out how to stretch cocaine profit margins -- crack happened. So cheap kids bought it with lunch money. That was on a Monday. On Tuesday, the streets were empty.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

There were Uzis and AK-47's instead of baseball bats. Watts became a war zone.

(to Fenster)

You had no idea, did you?

FENSTER

That my client's gross national product makes him the world's fifth largest economy? No. But at least I can stop worrying about paying my kid's college tuition.

(then; taking it all in)

No, no idea. Can we go?

WEBB, thinking, then--

WEBB

What are you going to do when you get Blandon on the stand?

FENSTER

Not a clue. I'm defending a man against a life sentence, and you know more about him than I do.

WEBB

I need Blandon to talk to me.

FENSTER

He's a protected witness. How're you going to do that?

WEBB

I can't. But you can.

FENSTER

(getting it)

You read my mind.

42

INT. FEDERAL COURT ROOM - LOS ANGELES - DAY

42

Mid-scene. Ross and Fenster at the defendant's table. Webb behind them. Franklin Smith across the aisle, before a box-load of records, flanked by three FEDERAL PROSECUTORS.

On the stand: DANILO BLANDON. Fancy suit. Aviator glasses.

SMITH

So just to make it crystal clear for our jury. You were the exclusive supplier for crack cocaine to Ricky Ross, who we are claiming was the largest distributor of narcotics in Los Angeles--

BLANDON

Cocaine. Not crack.

SMITH

Right, I apologize.
(not really)

Ross received delivery of pure Colombian cocaine and, like a fast-food restaurant, diluted, portioned and cooked it into mountains of crack many orders of magnitude larger, and sent it into the streets of Los Angeles.

BLANDON

Yes.

Smith sits back. Done. Fenster rises.

FENSTER

Ready for cross, your honor.

Now Smith clocks Webb. Cocks his head. Rising--

SMITH

Approach, your honor?

JUDGE

Later.

But Smith can't stop staring at Webb. Not at Webb as much as where he's standing: right behind Fenster.

FENSTER

Mr. Blandon, during the years you were acting as a paid informant for the U.S. Government - the years you say you wholesaled cocaine to my client in Los Angeles - did the government know that at the same time you were smuggling not kilos, not tens of kilos, but tons of cocaine into the United States?

SMITH
Objection! Relevance! Inflammatory!

FENSTER
The *government* called this witness,
your honor. He is a paid
confidential informant. The jury
has a right to know the scope of
his expertise.

JUDGE
Agreed.

FENSTER
Mr. Blandon?

BLANDON
Yes.

FENSTER
Yes what?

BLANDON
The government knew.

FENSTER
Everything?

BLANDON
Everything.

The Judge throws a curious glance at Smith. Webb hands Fenster a note. Fenster reads it, then--

FENSTER
(back to Blandon)
So the court understands what we're
talking about, please tell us how
many doses of crack cocaine you put
onto the streets of Los Angeles
every week.

BLANDON
Three, give or take.

FENSTER
Three thousand? Hundred thousand?

BLANDON
Million.

Audible hush over the courtroom.

FENSTER

So how much money did you take in while you were working for the US Government?

BLANDON

One and a half billion dollars.

The hush replaced by a murmur, then open chatter. Smith whispers to an Agent, who quickly leaves.

BLANDON (CONT'D)

We made so much money we had to keep an apartment just to keep the cash. It was floor to ceiling dollars. We had to rotate the money on the bottom to the top or else it would get moldy in the humidity.

Webb nods to Fenster. "Okay. Now."

SMITH

Wait ... what? Counsel is taking direction from this reporter!

JUDGE

Approach!

Smith and Fenster approach.

SMITH

That man in the first row is a reporter and giving counsel questions.

FENSTER

If he is - and I'm not saying he is-

JUDGE

Well he is.

FENSTER

Okay, he is. But there's nothing in the rules that says he can't.

JUDGE

That's true. I don't like it, but I can't stop it.

SMITH

Then I move to have the court cleared and Mr. Bandon's testimony given in closed session.

JUDGE

Not a chance.

SMITH

Then I am compelled to warn the court that this door leads to very sensitive national security matters.

JUDGE

Then maybe you shouldn't have opened it.

Smith and Fenster return to their places.

FENSTER

Mr. Bandon, you were on the DEA's most-wanted list, were you not?

BLANDON

Yes. I was Number Two.

FENSTER

Do you happen to know who was Number One?

BLANDON

Norwin Meneses.

FENSTER

And who is Norwin Meneses?

BLANDON

He's my partner.

FENSTER

Mr. Bandon, who in the Federal Government were you and Mr. Meneses working with?

BLANDON

You want a name?

FENSTER

Or a what. FBI--?

Bandon looking to Smith for a lifeline.

JUDGE

Mr. Smith can't answer that question for you, Mr. Blandon.

FENSTER

CIA?

(Blandon nods)

The Central Intelligence Agency.

BLANDON

Yeah.

FENSTER

Not the Drug Enforcement Agency--?

BLANDON

Well, them too.

Fenster looks at Webb. Stunned.

FENSTER

What did the CIA want from you, Mr. Blandon?

Webb waves Fenster over. Whispers furiously into his ear.

JUDGE

Mr. Fenster, at least pretend--

BLANDON

We were asked to support a free democratic Nicaragua - the Contras - the rebels - by sending planes to Nicaragua, and raising money here in the U.S. for the war.

WEBB

(to himself)

Did he just say Contras?

Webb - vibrating - slips right behind Fenster.

FENSTER

What was on those planes?

BLANDON

Food.

FENSTER

Just food?

BLANDON
Uniforms. And guns. And ammunition.

WEBB
Anything else?

FENSTER
Anything else, Mr. Bandon?

SMITH
C'mon!

JUDGE
Mr. Fenster!

*
*

BLANDON
Money. Sometimes just cash.

FENSTER
(a note from Webb)
Did the planes come back empty?

BLANDON
(so, to Webb)
No.

WEBB
What was on them?

FENSTER
What was on them?

BLANDON
(quiet)
Cocaine.

JUDGE
Would you repeat that, please?

BLANDON
The planes were loaded with
cocaine.

JUDGE
Who's planes, Mr. Bandon.

BLANDON
The CIA's.

FENSTER
And where did the planes land?

BLANDON
Here. California. Arizona. Florida.

The judge glaring at Smith with open hostility.

WEBB
 (to himself)
 Holy shit.

FENSTER
 Just to be perfectly clear: did you specifically tell the CIA that you were selling narcotics to buy guns and supplies to support its cause?

BLANDON
 They knew who we were. Why else would they come to us?

Webb sits there taking this all in. We all are. Finally, Webb calls Fenster over, slides him a last piece of paper.

FENSTER
 Last question, Mr. Blandon. What happened when the CIA didn't need your cocaine money any more? Did your relationship with the American government change after that?

BLANDON
 Yes.
 (then)
 It accepted my application for political asylum.

43

INT. MERCURY-NEWS NEWSROOM- SAN JOSE -DAY

43

Dawn spots Webb through her glass wall, leaves her office. Walks past another office, knocks twice on that wall. Inside the Executive Editor's office - a nameplate on the door - JERRY CEPPOS, 55, points up at the ceiling.

44

EXT. MERC BUILDING ROOFTOP - SAN JOSE, CA - DAY - LONG SHOT 44

Webb, Dawn and Ceppos.

DAWN
 The day Ronald Reagan got elected the Cubans and Soviets started triggering revolutions all over South and Central America. In our own back yard.
 (MORE)

DAWN (CONT'D)

When they got Nicaragua, that put them fifty miles from the Panama Canal. Reagan drew the line in the sand.

WEBB

That backwater was going to be our final engagement with the Evil Empire. That's where America was going to win the Cold War.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Except Congress hated Reagan's guts. They refused to fund his little war. So the White House needed money, lots and lots of money.

CEPPOS

That's fascinating guys, but that was ten years ago. What's the news--

DAWN

Just wait, Jerry. Let him finish.

WEBB

One drug trafficker - DEA's public enemy number one - not only not in jail for eternity but apparently under lock-tight protection by some other piece of the US government.

DAWN

Testifying for the Feds like a trained monkey.

WEBB

While admitting in open court he brought thousands of kilos of cocaine into the US every day. For them--

CEPPOS

For who?

WEBB

The US government. Or with them. Or at least while they were looking the other way.

Pause. Ceppos absorbing all that.

CEPPOS
Jesus. What are we really saying?

WEBB
I don't know everything yet.

CEPPOS
Because we're definitely
insinuating, and it's quite an
insinuation.

DAWN
It's not an insinuation, not any
more.

Pause. Ceppos not pleased.

CEPPOS
That stunt you pulled in that
courtroom, I got complaints from
the Justice Department in
Sacramento and Washington about it.

WEBB
I was told to get Blandon. I got
Blandon.

DAWN
Jerry.
(getting his attention)
This is the biggest story the
Merc's ever had.

CEPPOS
That's what bothers me. Too many
blind spots. We don't know
Washington. We don't do
International.

WEBB
We do now.

CEPPOS
What CIA sources do you have?

WEBB
None yet.

CEPPOS
Get one. What are they saying
officially?

WEBB

They're not even calling me back.

CEPPOS

I want that in the story.

(Dawn nods)

We're completely exposed on this.

DAWN

Nothing runs until we have it all.

CEPPOS

(to Webb)

You better be doing this because
it's true, not because you want it
to be true. Watch your ass.

And leaves them alone.

WEBB

We're alone on this, Dawn. No one
else is connecting the dots. No one
else knows this is a story.

DAWN

What makes you think they're going
to let us connect the dots?

WEBB

Who's they?

DAWN

The government. The CIA--

WEBB

Who's asking permission?

DAWN

(looks at him)

Okay, what do you need?

WEBB

Norwin Meneses.

DAWN

Where is he?

WEBB

I don't know yet.

DAWN

Everything through me. All travel
through my office. I want regular
updates. And notes on everything.
Don't fuck it up.

45 **OMIT**

45

A45 **EXT. COURTHOUSE - SAN FRANCISCO - MORNING**

A45

Rafael Cornejo, tan, country club whites, and Coral Baca,
head down the wide steps. They find --

-- Webb standing against a column.

WEBB

Hi.

CORNEJO

Who the fuck are you?

(Coral whispers in his
ear)

Gary Webb. So what do you want,
Gary?

WEBB

Norwin Meneses.

CORAL

I thought I told you to be happy.

WEBB

I want to talk to him.

CORNEJO

He don't talk to nobody.

WEBB

You think they're done with you,
Raffie? They'll give it a little
time, til they think you've
forgotten. Then they're coming back
around. And this time I won't be
there.

Cornejo looks at him. Then--

CORNEJO
You fuck Coral?

WEBB
Nope.

CORNEJO
You think about it?

WEBB
Yep.

Coral. Glimmer of a smile. She knows what she is.

CORAL
No one else knows where Norwin is.
(barely means it, because)

CORNEJO
Norwin's in a prison in Managua,
Nicaragua.
(then)
So what do you want.

WEBB
I want you to reach out to him. I
want you to tell him I'm coming.
And I want you to make sure he sees
me.

46 **EXT. TIPITAPA PRISON - MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - DAY** 46

Fortress walls in the middle of the city. A local taxi pulls to the curb. Webb steps out.

47 **INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY** 47

Webb leans, nervous, against the wall. A day-glo SECRETARY sits filing her nails. Behind her, an armed GOON in a too-small jacket and an AK-47 across his lap.

Webb hands the PRISON WARDEN his card. Under the card, folded to the same dimensions, are three hundred-dollar bills.

48

INT./EXT. PORTICO - TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY

48

Webb reaches a breezy secluded portico looking out on the prison courtyard. Seated there, a tanned MAN dressed in silk and slippers. Reading Borges. NORWIN MENESES, 45. The inmate potentate. A YOUNG INMATE beside him. Even the guards attend to him. This prison is his.

MENESES

(perfect English)

What took you so long?

WEBB

You were expecting me?

MENESES

You, or someone like you. No other journalist has tried. Let's just say that you were the one who came.

(then)

Do you play golf, Mr. Webb?

49

INT. PRISON COURTYARD - TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY

49

In the sun bleached prison court yard, Meneses and Webb hit golf balls up over the wall, as if they were at a driving range. Inmate low-lives fetch and re-bucket the balls that don't vanish over the prison walls. Other inmate lackeys place balls on Meneses' and Webb's Tees.

MENESES

(between swings)

It's easy to think this is only about drugs. But from our point of view, consider what would have happened if the Contra movement had no friends, no money. If we lost and the Communists won. The government tells us what we can say, think, and do for a living. Know your history, Mr. Webb. Cambodia, East Germany. If you were me, would you sit still and watch your children be forced into lives of irrelevance and servitude?

Webb swings. The ball vanishes high in the sky.

WEBB

Or watch from the deck of your yacht.

MENESES

I don't understand.

WEBB

Your yacht, your mansions. You were arrested for narcotics trafficking the first time in 1975. Ten years before the Contra war. I don't really see you in a Che Guevara beard and cap.

Meneses smiles, tips a nod. Okay, you got me. Meneses swings.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Did it have to be drugs?

MENESES

(shrugs; pretense gone)

We sell what we have. Americans don't want bananas and coconuts. They want cocaine. And I know where to get cocaine. My pilots are already flying between Central America and the U.S. They are Americans. They know where to land, where not to land. If I'm in the CIA and I'm sent overseas to risk my life doing something illegal, I'd want someone like me to help do the job.

WEBB

Who wanted you, specifically?

MENESES

Ollie wanted me. He called me personally.

WEBB

Oliver North--?

MENESES

In fact, my favorite part of all this was when Ollie walked into the DEA in Washington - this was in the early days - and suggested that cash seized in cocaine arrests be used to support the war.

(MORE)

MENESES (CONT'D)

They looked at him like he was crazier than hell. They declined, of course, politely. He was after all the President's emissary. But then Oliver suggested, okay, if they didn't like that idea, then how about if they could just *sell* cocaine to raise the money.

WEBB

He said it with a straight face?

MENESES

No one took him seriously. They should have. In a short period of time, Nicaraguan frog men in wet suits were landing on the shores of San Francisco, below the Golden Gate Bridge, beaching bales of my cocaine.

WEBB

A real revolutionary.

MENESES

There are better people to talk to than me. At the moment, given my living arrangements -- which could be worse, I have to admit -- there are others in a better position to help you understand. I can make introductions.

WEBB

Here?

MENESES

Nicaragua. And Washington. A good friend in Washington. Fred Weil. He'll be pleased to hear from me. But while you're here, if you want, I should introduce you to my banker.

50

EXT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - JUNGLE AIRSTRIP - DAY

50

Oven heat and whirlpooling dust. The hangar is half-collapsed, sun-bleached. Five doors marked 1 - 5. The airstrip long, for big planes, mostly overgrown. The Nicaraguan mountains are seen in the distance.

A Range Rover approaches. Webb with HANSJORG BOSCH, driving. A UBS BANKER in a suit and loose tie. It's 100-degrees.

They pull up in front, Webb gets out, walks up to the half collapsed hanger. He stares at it. Ominous. Something's in there. Or was.

LATER IN THE DAY. The temperature has risen. The sun melts the sky. Webb and Bosch stand together in the abandoned airstrip. Bosch shows him around.

BOSCH

We have fifty transport depots.
From Colombia to Nicaragua.
From there, to here, to your
country.

The desolate privacy of the place is numbing, to Webb, and to us. HOLD, then--

-- Webb and Bosch turn. On the horizon, dust plumes. Two vehicles speeding toward him. Closing in. Military camouflage. Webb and Bosch alone before the onrushing cavalry. Their arms slowly lifting overhead.

The SOLDIERS jump out of the vehicles, guns pointed.

SOLDIER 1

(Spanish)

*What are you doing here? You're
trespassing!*

BOSCH

(to Webb)

Don't answer that.

SOLDIER 1

(to Bosch)

Shut up!

(to both of them)

Papers? Papers??

Webb hands them his passport and press card. Bosch hands them his ID.

SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)

(laughs)

Prensa--?

(hands it back)

*There's no stories here. This is
private property. If you want to
live. Leave. Now!*

Webb and Bosch carefully take back their credentials and walk across the field to their car. The Soldier's watch. It's tense.

CUT TO:

51 **EXT. TAXI. WASHINGTON DC. DAY** 51

Webb in a taxi traveling through DC. The CITY is reflected in the window as he's looking out.

52 **EXT. OLD EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING - WASHINGTON, DC - DAY** 52

White House to the east. Capitol dome to the south. It's lunchtime. Sidewalk roiling with the federal crowd. CAMERA FINDS WEBB in a phone booth watching the entrance, holding a sheath of papers under his arm. Wearing the same clothes as Nicaragua. He watches the street.

DAWN/PHONE

You're where?

WEBB/PHONE

I'm in DC.

DAWN/PHONE (OVER)

Jeez. I need you here. You're supposed to be here.

WEBB/PHONE

Dawn, I'm close.

WEBB/PHONE (CONT'D)

I'm starting to understand the what. I just don't have the why yet.

DAWN/PHONE (OVER)

Upstairs is getting really nervous.

WEBB/PHONE

You want me here. Nicaragua leads to Washington, not California.

DAWN/PHONE (OVER)

But the dope came here?

WEBB/PHONE

I'm not talking about dope.

(Beat)

Look. I changed planes in Miami. I kept all the receipts. We can't do this on the phone. I don't want to do this on the phone.

Webb looks out, spots who he's looking for. A small owlish man, 40ish. Glasses around his neck: FRED WEIL.

WEBB

I have to go.

He hangs up, and crosses through the crowds to Weil. Webb falls into step beside Weil.

WEIL

Who are you?

WEBB

Gary Webb, San Jose Mercury-News.

WEIL

Never heard of it.

(keeps going)

I don't talk to the press. Call public affairs.

WEBB

I don't think you'd want them to know.

Weil looks at Webb's ragged clothes. Then the thing in Webb's hand. He stops.

WEIL

Dammit.

WEBB

You want to know how many pages your name appears on? I can't tell you. It's redacted.

(Weil looks at him)

But Norwin Meneses told me what's under all the black ink.

Weil STOPS. Like he's been hit in the head with a baseball.

WEIL

(disgust)

How'd you find him?

(MORE)

WEIL (CONT'D)
 (before Webb can answer)
 This isn't how this works.

WEBB
 How does it work?

WEIL
 You ever been to Washington before?

WEBB
 Fifth grade class trip.

53

EXT. MALL - WASHINGTON, DC - DAY

53

Webb and Weil sitting on a bench along the Reflecting Pool.
 Parade of joggers and tourists passing by. Weil looks grim.

WEIL
 Can I eat my lunch at least?
 (the papers on Webb's
 knee)
 That's classified. How did you get
 it?

WEBB
 A drug dealer gave it to me.

WEIL
 Perfect.
 (disgusted, throws his
 lunch away)
 Listen, I was the lead investigator
 of the Senate sub-committee that
 investigated this. I know what this
 is. It's a nightmare. You have no
 idea what you're getting into.

Webb lights a cigarette. Poker.

WEIL (CONT'D)
 Look, I'm on the National Security
 Council now. And I have the trust
 of the President and his cabinet.
 It took me ten years to undo the
 damage and get back to that place.
 (grabs the papers)
 See this shit? Everyone who touched
 this was destroyed. I lost my
 marriage, my job.
 (MORE)

WEIL (CONT'D)

My ex convinced the court my kids were in jeopardy just being around me. I lost them too for a while.

(hands it back)

What do you want from me?

WEBB

Tell me about Blandon and Meneses.

WEIL

They're the symptom, not the disease.

Joggers approach. Weil waits, then:

WEIL (CONT'D)

We started hearing things about a particular government agency. Ludicrous impossible things.

WEBB

The CIA.

WEIL

It turned out it wasn't so ludicrous. Or impossible. I underestimated - badly - how much the White House wanted to win that brutal little war.

WEBB

You're telling me the US government actually got money from the drugs?

WEIL

It was just the Agency. But they weren't pocketing the money. They were too clever for that. They let it detour south, flow into Central America, to the rebels, to the Contras.

WEBB

It's too stupid to be true.

WEIL

Unless you were the Reagan White House, or the CIA, where it was a whole lot of true.

WEBB

Why doesn't everyone know about this?

WEIL

Because for the first time in the history of our country the United States government launched a propaganda campaign against itself, and against the American people. By the time they were done, they had everyone - Congress, the entire Washington press corps - convinced that my investigators and I were all bat-shit crazy.

WEBB

Hold on a second--

WEIL

Not the New York Times, not CBS news, not the Washington Post - would touch it with a ten-foot pole. It just went away like it never happened.

(after a long beat)

Who did you say you worked for?

(then)

Ever do anything like this before?

(Webb shakes, No)

Has your paper?

WEBB

Not that I know of.

WEIL

This is fancy information you have. And dangerous. I'd be remiss if I didn't tell you that other reporters have gone down this rabbit hole. Seasoned reporters who knew their way around Washington and Central America.

WEBB

What are you telling me?

WEIL

I'm telling you that I had an American citizen, a rich Republican Party fund-raiser, a White House favorite, in my office, upset about what he was hearing. He believed in freedom and defeating communism, but not laundering narcotics money for guns. And as he was sitting in my office, in the U.S. Senate, he got a phone call telling him that if he talked to me he'd die.

(looks at Webb; seen this all before)

But this is your ticket out of small-time, right? To the New York Times or the Post? You're going to make your bones on this.

WEBB

This is a true story.

WEIL

My friend, some stories are just too true to tell.

WEBB

That's insane.

WEIL

And yes it is. Congratulations. You figured it out.

And Webb not exactly appreciating Weil's dryness--

WEBB

Then what's your point?

WEIL

You have a family?

WEBB

Yeah I got a family.
(long heavy silence)
You're telling me to walk away.

WEIL

Knowing what I know? The little I know about you? You'd be an idiot not to. *That's* my point.

A54

INT. SACRAMENTO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - NIGHT

A54

It's late. Webb, exhausted, wrung out, heads through the garage away from the terminal. Still in the clothes from Managua and DC.

It's quiet. Graveyard travel shift. All shadows and echoes in here. Spotting his car--

Until he hears other noises ... other footsteps. And Webb slows. Knows he's not alone, keeps going, quickening his pace ... nervous. Two MEN in suits behind him. They seem in no hurry. They seem to be loitering. Are they looking at him?

Turning his body now, Webb walks, then jogs ... heads for the stairs. To the bottom. Stops. Looks up. Into the shadows.

Nothing. The shuffle of a foot. A step. Then.

Silence.

Was that real?

54

INT./EXT. WEBB'S CAR/WEBB'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - SACRAMENTO - NEXT MORNING

Webb sits in the driveway behind the wheel of his car, lost in thought. Been there all night.

Hard KNOCK on the glass. Webb startles. Ian standing there with the morning paper. Webb rolls down the window. Weary smile, but hey it's great to see his kid--

WEBB

Hiya, pal. You're a sight for sore eyes.

IAN

Um, whadya doing, dad?

WEBB

I don't know. Thinking. Waiting. Mostly thinking--

He gets out, gives his kid a hug. The door opens. Sue coming out with the rest of the troops. All armored up for school.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Where you guys going?

Funny smiles. Sue kisses his warrior home.

SUE
Uh, school. Normal life--?

WEBB
Yeah, normal life--
(as if a vague, distant
idea)

55

INT. BEDROOM, WEBB'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

55

Webb with a towel wrapped at his waist, sits at the edge of the bed. The sheets with an apres-sex chaos about them. There's a roach in an ashtray on the night stand. Webb lights it. Taking a drag. Sue wanders back in.

WEBB
You want?

She coming around behind him. Kissing his neck. Takes a drag.

SUE
Sometimes I want to just climb in
that head of yours, and see the
shit you carry around in there.

WEBB
Really?

SUE
(thinking again)
Nah. Not really. Too crowded in
there. Too steamy. Too many ghosts
and bad guys and scary monsters
running around.

WEBB
You want me to stop? Do something
else for a living?

SUE
No. But it has to be you--

WEBB
Is that a question?

SUE
Would it matter if it was?

WEBB

Not really. It *is* me. It's just
always been me.

SUE

And it's true.

WEBB

It's true.

SUE

(takes him in)

It's actually the first of the sexy
things I loved about you.

(and)

I'm proud of this part of you. I'd
never ask you not to do it--

(and hands him his pillow)

Just get this one over with.

WEBB

(staring at the pillow;
she's telling him to go
downstairs)

We just made love.

SUE

Now go away.

Phone rings. Webb, annoyed, picks up.

SMITH/PHONE (OVER)

It's Franklin Smith.

WEBB

Hello, Franklin Smith.

SMITH/PHONE (OVER)

We haven't handled this right.
Let's back up, have a real
conversation. Before you print
anything there are some things you
need to know.

(Webb lights up)

Hello?

WEBB

I'm listening.

SMITH/PHONE (OVER)

Someone will contact you tomorrow.

56 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - NIGHT**

56

Later that night. Sue leaves her bedroom and walks down the hallway. Something's bothering her. She heads into the FAMILY ROOM --

SUE

Gary?

Webb, on the couch, sits up. WHIRLS. Jumpy.

SUE (CONT'D)

You hear that?

A tree. Scraping the window. Nothing. Webb crosses to the window. There's a car parked incongruously in the middle of the block.

HOLD on Gary at the night-dark window, staring out there. At nothing in particular. And everything.

57 **EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY**

57

Webb pulls up to a modest office building squirreled away in shabby anonymity. Smith waiting at the door.

58 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

58

Webb enters with Smith. The room has no signage or information; seems rented. Three FEDERAL AGENTS seated around a table. Two we recognize from court:

SMITH

(introducing them)

Agents Miller and Jones.

The other is not introduced.

MILLER

Can we get you a cup of coffee, Gary? Can I call you Gary? How about one of those lattes? We just got a new machine, probably cost the taxpayers thirty grand.

WEBB

I'm fine.

MILLER

Get him a latte.

(Smith leaves)

So okay. We have a conundrum. We fucked up.

JONES

We didn't fuck up--

MILLER

We fucked up.

(throws Jones a shut-the-fuck-up look)

We don't agree with everything that happens in our Agency, so this is a little awkward for us. But you're getting into some sensitive areas. There are ongoing operations you're in danger of exposing. Operations that have taken months and years to set up. Thousands of man-hours. Millions to fund.

They expect Webb to say something. He doesn't. Then he does.

WEBB

How do you know that?

MILLER

Well, we know you were in Nicaragua. We know you saw Meneses.

But obviously so much more--

WEBB

Am I being followed?

JONES

What's your angle, Webb? That your government uses scumbags to catch bigger scumbags? Newsflash--

WEBB

I was under the impression *you* had something you wanted to say to *me*. But since you asked, No. My angle is that the American government helped put drugs on its streets to fund an illegal, unpopular and ultimately futile war.

JONES

What you want to say happened never happened.

WEBB

Then why am I here?
 (points at the silent agent)
 Why is he here?

MILLER

We're not the bad guys. Meneses is a bad guy. Ricky Ross is a bad guy--

JONES

What do you think, we work shitty hours and miss our kids' soccer games and birthdays for crappy government pay to sit in a bunker somewhere where we figure out all the ways we can fuck with the American people?

MILLER

Why not just let the past stay in the past?

WEBB

(flash of anger)
 Because what happens when you guys screw up? When do you get to the part when you learn how not to screw things up?

MILLER

American kids, American soldiers, were going to die.

WEBB

American kids did die. They're still dying. Just not the ones you care about.

That lays there like an armed grenade.

UNIDENTIFIED AGENT

(menacing)
 We'd never threaten your children, Mr. Webb.

WEBB
 (head snaps around; then)
 This was a mistake.
 (and he's up)

MILLER
 What if we can deliver something
 even better than Blandon?

WEBB
 Are you people even allowed to be
 doing this?

SMACK. Someone throws an envelope on the table.

UNIDENTIFIED AGENT
 Open it.

Money. A lot of it. Webb leaves it and starts to go.

MILLER
 (quickly)
 Glad we had a chance to meet. Let
 us discuss the proposal amongst
 ourselves.

WEBB
 There is no proposal. There is
 nothing to discuss.

59

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, MERC NEWSROOM, SAN JOSE, CA - DAY

59

We're at a conference table. Webb, Dawn Garcia, Jerry Ceppos,
 Managing Editor, JONATHAN YARNOLD, and other SUITS.

Webb and Dawn shoulder to shoulder. Webb fiery. A focused,
 organized look to him.

WEBB
 Just think of this operation as an
 act of unbridled criminal stupidity
 cloaked in a blanket of national
 security.

DAWN
 Meaning it's not just a CIA story.

WEBB
 It's *not* about the CIA. It's bigger
 than that.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

It's the story of how government, this government, works. How far it can go, how many human beings it is willing to sacrifice for a good idea - National Security - based on a threat that may or may not exist. A free Nicaragua -- who even knows if that's a good thing? Crack running through the streets of America? I think we can agree that *isn't*.

(then)

This is the story of one of the greatest political fuck-ups in modern times, the Big Bang of the national crack epidemic. A chain reaction started with a whole lot of ends justifying the means, topped off by a little bit of shit happens and bad timing.

(then)

But then they let it happen.

DAWN

The story of what government shouldn't be but is.

They all take that in. Webb and Dawn HOLD a long look. Then--

WEBB

We're running out of time.

YARNOLD

And we're sure. Everything's sourced, everything's checked.

Slight hesitation. Dawn again looks to Webb. He nods.

DAWN

It's locked down.

YARNOLD

Then we're in. A hundred percent.

CEPPOS

Bring it home.

Webb sneaks a few hits on a roach, blowing the smoke out the window. His door to his office is locked. His FAMILY'S heard OVERSCENE -- laughter, watching TV, Eric making stupid jokes about Christine -- Ian telling him to shut up -- Sue sending Eric to his room.

Webb smiles to himself re: the family walla. He flicks his roach out the window and walks to the wall. He stares up at the tacked up index cards. Rough flow-charts showing the ways the money and weapons flowed from LA to Nicaragua, and the way the dope flowed from Nicaragua to LA. And the names of the players ... Blandon, Meneses, Ross, CIA.

Now CLOSE on photos of OLIVER NORTH, Meneses, Blandon, and one or two other AMERICAN SPOOKS, drinking beer under an awning at the airstrip.

Another -- North taking "The Oath", squeezed into full dress regalia, that chest-ful of medals, right palm flat against the air. Crossing his heart to God.

Webb gets close to the wall, studying the rough-flow charts showing the ways the money and weapons flowed from LA to Nicaragua.

QUICK CUTS--

A DC-9 is loaded with boxes that are labeled "*frozen shrimp*" in the Nicaraguan jungle where it's 100-degrees.

That same DC-9 landing at a desolate airstrip in Florida. A PILOT IN A WINDBREAKER loading boxes of 'frozen shrimp' into Hertz vans.

Trucks stripped, piping stuffed with bladders of cocaine.

The vans and trucks on American interstates.

Now a CRACK HOUSE in WATTS. Powder cocaine cooked by MOTHERS, their KIDS playing around their feet.

CLOSE on a tray of Cocaine in the oven. The POWDER suddenly cracks and splits like the ground in Death Valley.

BACK TO WEBB. He moves a photo of RICKY ROSS next to the photos of Meneses and Blandon.

NOW WE SEE Ricky Ross in a nondescript shit hole apartment. He's feeding bricks of cash into a counting machine.

Blandon squeezes into a small apartment in MIAMI. The room loaded with American cash floor-to-ceiling.

BACK TO WEBB. He scrawls across a map, a line connecting Southern California to Arizona to Nicaragua.

AN AIRSTRIP in TUSCON. WINDBREAKER MAN is met by waiting pickups and a WHITE AMERICAN dressed in full khakis. His guys load crates marked as weapons and ammunition. A layer of crates marked RED CROSS and UNICEF supplies atop that.

TO the Swiss Banker, BOSCH, seating Blandon in his UBS office in Panama City.

BACK TO WEBB in his office. He starts TYPING.

INTERCUTTING to the WHITE AMERICAN delivering weapons to camouflaged outfits in the Nicaraguan jungle -- Scenes of jungle warfare. Corpses lying akimbo.

BACK TO WEBB. More typing.

73

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

73

Webb's asleep on the couch. A sound. He opens his eyes. Christine in her pj's, in the crook of his arm. She's climbed in with him.

WEBB

Hey, baby.

CHRISTINE

Who's that outside, Daddy?

Fast, soundlessly, Webb's into sneakers and jeans. Fumbles under the couch, searching for the hand gun, slips it into his jeans.

WEBB

Go upstairs to mommy, okay, baby?
Wait until daddy gets back.

74

EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - SAME

74

Webb opens the front door, steps out onto the lawn with its dark shrubs and spindly little trees.

75

EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - SAME

75

Webb crosses towards the driveway. A sudden rustling. Webb spins, gun ready.

OUR POV - CHRISTINE Appears in the open front door...

As Webb creeps toward the driveway. Through the leaves.

There's SOMEONE on his knees on the other side of the TR-6. Webb crouches for a clear sight-line, cocks the gun. We HEAR:

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

DADDY!

The intruder BOLTS. We SEE he's white, groomed. Webb FIRES into the dark. Nothing. Shadows. Emptiness.

76

EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - LATER

76

TWO POLICE CARS and ONE DETECTIVE car parked in front of the WEBB house. Two COPS and a DETECTIVE have Webb against the Detective car.

WEBB

The guy was messing with my car.

DETECTIVE

What guy?

WEBB

I told you. The intruder.

DETECTIVE

Who doesn't seem to exist.

WEBB

He does! I saw him!

DETECTIVE

Okay, so then you try to kill him?

WEBB

I was defending my family.

COP

By shooting at nothing?

WEBB

The guy wasn't just trying to boost my car. Maybe he was doing something else.

DETECTIVE

Like what, planting a bomb?
(to the cop)
Any bombs?

COP

No bombs.

DETECTIVE

You have any reason to believe your family is in danger, Mr. Webb?

Pause. Webb hesitates, considers answering that. Looks around: not a sympathetic face in uniform.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

Any family history of paranoia?

COP

Your neighbors don't appreciate gunfire. Or men in the street waving guns. Especially at night. When their kids are trying to sleep.

SUE (O.S.)

Gary!!

77

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE

77

Webb bum-rushing ahead of the Cops into his office. Where a MAN IN A SUIT is nosing up to Webb's walls. Perusing the index cards. Sue blocking another man from Webb's desk.

WEBB

What the hell?

SUE

They have no right to be in here.

SUIT

It's a crime scene.

WEBB

Who the hell are you?

The Suit keeps fingering through the files. Sue SHOVES at him hard. It hardly registers. A PHONE starts ringing from the KITCHEN.

WEBB (CONT'D)
GET - OUT - OF - OUR - HOUSE!!

Now Ian pushing through the scrum. Webb puts his hockey stick in his hands. PHONE keeps ringing from the kitchen.

WEBB (CONT'D)
Anyone tries to look at any of this
stuff hit him with this.

Webb makes his way out of the room, down the hallway to kitchen. He picks up the phone --

WEBB (CONT'D)
(into phone)
What!?

DAWN/PHONE
What the hell's going on--?

WEBB
It's under control.

DAWN/PHONE
I just got a call saying you shot
someone.

WEBB
Shot at--

Sue enters --

SUE
Who is that?

WEBB
Dawn.

Sue leaves --

WEBB (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

SUE
Our children, Gary. Remember them?

78

EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - MOMENTS LATER

78

Webb and Ian follow the Suit into the street. Webb's NEIGHBORS staring hostilely at him now.

Suit crosses to a Buick, gets in. (Same car parked down the block.)

WEBB

(as the Buick drives off)
I know that car.

IAN

(grabbing him)
Let it go.

79

INT. LIVING ROOM, WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - LATER

79

Almost dawn. Eric asleep on the couch. Sue rocking Christine. Webb sits with his arm around a wired Ian.

SUE

You want Ian to kill someone with a hockey stick? Because he'll do anything for you.

WEBB

This is my job.

SUE

Your first job is not the world's bullshit. It's *our* bullshit. We had a deal. Never bring this home.

A beat. She looks at her sleepy daughter, gets up, carrying her.

SUE (CONT'D)

(as she's walking away)
You kicked the Hornets nest. If you're going to put us through this, you better make it worth it.

80

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - NEXT DAY

80

Webb unearthing documents from boxes, dozens of notebooks, facts and dates and names on torn squares of paper and taped up to walls. Moving them, building the building of the story.

BOB
Gary? ... Where's Gary?

88

INT/EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN - LATER THAT NIGHT

88

Later. The whole party - minus Webb - gathered around the computer now. Everyone reading in grim and focused silence.

Through the window, Webb sitting on the porch. Alone. Beer in hand. Staring into the dark.

Sue sneaks off to Gary, outside.

SUE
(into his ear)
You did it, baby.
(Gary smiles. Loves his
woman)
Let's go fool around in the woods.

She takes him by the hand and leads him away from the house.

89

EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN - NEXT MORNING

89

Webb out on the porch in his boxers on a cordless phone. He's badly hung over.

CEPPOS/PHONE
(excited)
Gary. I'm sitting here with Dawn.
You should see our switchboard.
Every line pinned.

DAWN/PHONE
We're getting calls from all over
the world. What do you want to do?

WEBB
I wanna keep running out the story.
Keep gathering string.

DAWN/PHONE
Anything you need. But take a
victory lap. We're just calling to
say thanks for doing this. There's
a lot of pride here this morning.
(then)
Hey, Gary?

WEBB

Yeah, Dawn?

DAWN/PHONE

This is the Big One. You did it.

90 **EXT. CIA - HEADQUARTERS - LANGLEY - ESTABLISHING (STOCK SHOT)** 90

91 **INT. CIA HEADQUARTERS - LANGLEY, VA. - DAY** 91

HOLD on a closed door embossed with the CIA seal. Nameplate reads: "*John Deutch, Director*".

After a long beat the door opens, as MARC MANSFIELD, Mid-30's Director of public affairs, exits the room not before we see over his shoulder, DEUTCH - 58, reed thin - surrounded by an array of OFFICIALS in crisis management. The door closes.

92 **INT. OUTSIDE OF MANSFIELD'S OFFICE - CIA HQ - CONTINUOUS** 92

Mansfield enters his OFFICE AREA crosses to his secretary's desk. She hands him a list of names. He scans it.

MANSFIELD

Let's focus on the Post, the Times and LA Times. Get some TV on here. And get Franklin Smith out here from San Francisco. I want him to sit down with the Post.

He walks away, enters his office, closes the door.

93 **INT. OFFICE - WASHINGTON POST - WASHINGTON DC - DAY** 93

Behind a glass wall sits WALTER ZUCKERMAN, 64, nimbus of white hair. Surrounded by photos of him with the great politicians of the last 30 years.

A copy of the Mercury-News on his desk. Picks up a ringing phone.

MANSFIELD/PHONE (OVER)

Walter, Marc Mansfield.

INTERCUT Zuckerman AND MANSFIELD.

94

INT. MANSFIELD'S OFFICE - CIA HQ - DAY

94

MANSFIELD

You usually sound happier to hear from me.

ZUCKERMAN

Not today.

MANSFIELD

Who the hell's Gary Webb?

ZUCKERMAN

A nobody, as far as I can tell. Clearly no understanding of how this town works.

(then)

I know I don't need to tell you this, but if this story stands, some of your people are going to jail. And I might have to retire.

MANSFIELD

What if I told you there's more to say on this, a whole other point of view.

ZUCKERMAN

The Washington Post is always open-minded.

95

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - L.A. TIMES - DAY

95

Kline and eight other REPORTERS and EDITORS are around a table. Glum and silent. EDITOR LEO WOLINSKY, 45, running the meeting. Throws a copy of the Merc on the table.

EDITOR

I, for one, didn't think the writing was very good. The Mercury-News is one step removed from being a supermarket circular.

WOLINSKY

What interests me is who's going to tell me how we missed this goddamn story. How the San Jose Mercury-News, a paper one-fifth the size of the Los Angeles Times and three-hundred miles away, scooped us on one of the most important stories in this city in, oh, say, the last ten or twenty years? ... Anybody? Any ideas? How about you, Rich?

KLINE

I'm sorry, Leo.

WOLINSKY

Didn't we cover Ricky Ross? I seem to remember you checking into it.

KLINE

Parts of it.

WOLINSKY

Apparently the wrong parts.

EDITOR

We had Blandon in one of our stories.

WOLINSKY

As what?

KLINE

Government source.

WOLINSKY

Well, apparently he's also almost single-handedly responsible for the crack epidemic, which I myself on the editorial page of this paper called the most destructive force to ever hit urban America. Oh and which, by the way, started right here in Los Angeles. Watts--
 (pointing out the window)
 --five fucking miles from where we're sitting!

Long loud silence. Wolinsky picks up the Merc.

WOLINSKY (CONT'D)

Could this even be true? *Did* the CIA help start the crack epidemic in America?

KLINE

It's thin.

EDITOR

Reads like a fairy tell.

WOLINSKY

Well this fairy tale is going to win this guy a Pulitzer. Unless we take it away from him. This thing is full of holes. Find them.

(buttonholes an editor on the way out)

Get Doyle McManus back here from Washington. I want at least fifteen people on this thing.

Meeting breaks up. As everyone heads for the door the Editor moves toward Wolinsky, who's seated as before:

EDITOR

Leo, what if we're overreacting? What if people don't even care? I mean, it's the San Jose Mercury-News. By a guy no one ever heard of. Is anyone going to even pay attention?

96

INT. CBS NEWSCAST (STOCK FOOTAGE)

96

DAN RATHER

Good evening from New York, and welcome to the CBS Evening News. Our lead story tonight is the investigative bombshell dropped by reporter Gary Webb of a paper I admit I never read before, the San Jose Mercury-News. The story is pulsing through America's cities like a shockwave, provoking a stunning, growing level of anger and indignation. Talk-radio stations all over the country are deluged with calls.

(widen to reveal--)

97

INT. CEPPOS' OFFICE - MERC NEWSROOM - SAN JOSE - DAY (NEWS 97
FOOTAGE IS STOCK FOOTAGE)

Ceppos, Yarnold and Garcia seated. Webb stands in the open doorway. TV in the corner plays the east coast feed.

DAN RATHER

Demonstrations, candle-lighting ceremonies and town-hall meetings are becoming regular affairs in cities like New York, Chicago and Atlanta, and in Los Angeles, the epicenter of the crack epidemic. And people on the streets are heatedly discussing the topic.

WIDEN TO reporters and editors gathering beyond Webb in the doorway.

TV CUTS TO A SPLICED SEQUENCE OF THE WAR ON DRUGS. "Just say no" ... "This is your brain on drugs". Finally, battle footage from the Nicaraguan Civil War. And BACK TO:

DAN RATHER (CONT'D)

The Mercury News claims the CIA's blind focus on supporting the Nicaraguan Contras had a direct hand in creating this...

NOW FOOTAGE OF URBAN DEVASTATION IN WATTS. Then:

JOHN DEUTCH

("CIA Director John Deutch")

There is no connection whatsoever between the CIA and cocaine traffickers. But I have called for an internal investigation to commence immediately.

DAN RATHER

So has Attorney General Janet Reno and DEA Director Jack Lawn. The question is: if it's true, if it's even half true, where have the tens and hundreds of billions of dollars spent on the War on Drugs gone?

WIDEN TO ROOM

The group of reporters and editors now spilling out of the doorway, into the newsroom. Rapt attention.

BACK TO TV

CUTS TO A NEWS CONFERENCE ON CAPITOL STEPS. Two dozen CONGRESSMEN and SENATORS. Faces grim.

Title: "Representative Maxine Waters, D - California"

MAXINE WATERS

(shaking with rage)

Danilo Bandon and Norwin Meneses came into our neighborhoods with the drugs. They came in with the guns. They made the money. And boy, what did they leave in their wake? A trail of devastation, addictions, killings, crack babies. It's awful. It's unconscionable. And I'm committed -- if I have to spend the rest of my life getting to the bottom of it, I intend to do that.

(then)

I want to announce that congressional investigators have already brought me further evidence of CIA complicity on this drug ring.

Ceppos aims the remote. TV goes dark. The crowd dissipates, back-slappy happy. When Webb, Dawn and Ceppos are alone:

DAWN

I have requests for you from CNN, CNBC, CBS morning news, Jerry Springer, Geraldo Rivera, Tom Snyder, Rich Jackson and Montel Williams. London Times and Le Monde are sending reporters in to interview you. 60-Minutes and Dateline both want you but only if you don't do the other one.

CEPPOS

I got the call last night. You're National Press Association Journalist of the Year.

Long silence. Too happy to speak. CEPPOS hands Webb an envelope.

CEPPOS (CONT'D)

A little token of our appreciation. Take a few days off.

He pats him on the back. Dawn smiles, and the two walk out.
Webb opens the envelope. A CHECK for \$250.00.

98

EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN - ANOTHER DAY - MAGIC HOUR

98

Back at the cabin. On the porch, Just Webb and Sue enjoying the glorious light and drinking expensive Champagne. A GIFT BASKET to the side. A card reads "*your family at the Merc*".

WEBB

I almost ruined everything.

SUE

Yep.

WEBB

I'm a pain in the ass.

SUE

Yeah you are.

WEBB

I'm sorry.

SUE

No you're not. But you're worth it.

WEBB

Am I?

(she nods)

But I was right. About this.

SUE

Yeah you were. Come here.

She leans into him. They start to make out like teenagers.

99

INT. HARDBALL STAGE - CNBC STUDIOS - NEW YORK - DAY

99

Webb sitting across from CHRIS MATTHEWS. Pre-air prep: make-up, hair. Matthews won't look up. A hostile silence.

Lights up. PRODUCER signals four ... three ... two ...

CHRIS MATTHEWS

(ambush)

Gary Webb, please give this audience evidence of direct involvement by American CIA agents in this so-called cocaine conspiracy.

WEBB

I didn't say anything about American CIA agents.

CHRIS MATTHEWS

You didn't?

WEBB

The CIA uses cut-outs. Foreign nationals. That keeps American fingerprints off covert operations. No CIA payroll stubs. So if anything goes sideways--

(mock surrender)

--the CIA can say, What? Who? Me? We don't know those guys.

(then)

That's who I was writing about. The guys who do our dirty work for us. The Danilo Blandons of the world.

Matthews pouts, studies his notes, trying to recover.

CHRIS MATTHEWS

Can you produce one single piece of paper to back up your story?

WEBB

I can. I do. It's all there for the world to see. Affidavits, transcripts, FBI documents ... all on the Mercury-News website. In fact, it's the first time a newspaper's ever used its website to put all its sources for everyone to see. A new era of transparency--

CHRIS MATTHEWS

(interrupts; shaken)

And we'll be right back with more from Gary Webb.

Stage goes dark. Break for commercial.

CHRIS MATTHEWS (CONT'D)
 (explodes; rips off mic)
 DAMMIT! Who told me this guy was
 full of shit?!

Off Webb, a little awkward. Funny. He won that round for sure.

100 **EXT. TWO-LANE ROAD - ANOTHER DAY** 100

Near the CABIN HOUSE, Webb is on his motorcycle gliding like a bird through the rolling hills, god's country.

101 **EXT. PHONE BOOTH - MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - DAY** 101

DOUG FARAH - a reporter from the WASHINGTON POST. He's a short guy in a sports coat. He ducks into an isolated phone booth. Dials.

102 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - WASHINGTON POST - WASHINGTON DC -** 102
SIMULTANEOUS

Zuckerman picks up the phone.

ZUCKERMAN
 (into phone; gruff)
 Put him on.
 (puts phone on speaker)
 Jackson Diehle's here with me.

ANGLE - JACKSON DIEHLE, 50, Foreign Desk Editor.

INTERCUT FARAH (Managua) AND ZUCKERMAN & DIEHLE (DC).

FARAH
 It's checking out, Walter. I found the banker. He met with Webb. He confirmed. He laundered drug money for the Contras. Other money came from the north. He sent it where it was needed. Blood to a wound.

Zuckerman and Diehle exchange worried glances.

ZUCKERMAN

Where in the north did it come from?

FARAH

According to the this guy, it happened the way Webb said it did.

JACKSON DIEHLE

Are these sources reliable enough - for the Post, I mean? They're all drug dealers--

FARAH

The banker isn't a drug dealer. And two of the others were bag men for Oliver North. There's also an American ex-pat who's had a ranch in the jungle for thirty years, and he let the planes land and take off on his airstrip, and he let them store dope on his property. So yeah, I'd say the story's reliable.

ZUCKERMAN

I'm not buying it. You're talking to drug dealers and money launderers. I'm talking to Langley.

FARAH

There's nothing to buy. It's staring you in the face. We gotta eat this one.

ZUCKERMAN

I have better information that says otherwise.

FARAH

Well, I'd like to see it.

(then)

You gonna cut my copy, Walter?

Long silence. Farah shoves his hands in his pockets, enraged.

FARAH (CONT'D)

Anyway, I'm filing. You guys do whatever you want with it.

Farah hangs up.

JACKSON DIEHLE
So what's our point of view?

ZUCKERMAN
That Webb is trying to make two plus two equal ten. That the CIA would never use those low-lives, and in fact denies it unequivocally. And that Webb's practices borderline journalistic malfeasance. Basically, he's a fraud, and so's this story.

JACKSON DIEHLE
I'll take that upstairs and see if it'll fly.

103 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - DAY** 103

Webb, Sue and the kids are watching the network news. New furniture added to the old. Big new color TV.

104 **INT. KOPPEL NEWSCAST (STOCK FOOTAGE)** 104

TED KOPPEL
(TV)
Our lead story tonight is a Senate hearing looking into allegations made by a California reporter, Gary Webb, that the CIA has been trafficking in cocaine--

Webb sits up.

TED KOPPEL (CONT'D)
(TV)
And that the CIA is responsible for the crack epidemic.

SUE
Gary. They're twisting your words.

TV CUTS TO FOOTAGE OF CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY BY FRED WEIL

WEIL

(TV)

We found no evidence that the African-American community was specifically targeted by a plot to sell crack cocaine, or that high U.S. officials had an *official* policy of supporting the Contras through drug sales.

SUE

That's not what he said, asshole! What do they mean 'specifically targeted'? You never said that!

TED KOPPEL

In other news...

SUE

Wait ... where's the rest?
(stands)
Where the hell's the rest!?

WEBB

They edited Weil's testimony.

Off Gary, worried --

105

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - LATER THAT NIGHT

105

Webb sits staring into the aquarium. The fish are circling. Rest of the house asleep.

He walks over to his phone. Picks up the phone, dials.

WEBB

(into phone)
It's Gary Webb.

KLINE/PHONE

Jesus, what time is it?

WEBB

Late.
(long pause)

KLINE/PHONE

Hello?

WEBB

What's going on, Rich? They edited
Weil's congressional testimony.
They changed things around.

KLINE/PHONE

I can't. I'm sorry.

WEBB

What?

Kline hangs up.

106

EXT. BANQUE SWISSE - PANAMA CITY, PANAMA - DAY

106

Another hot day in Central America. The banker, Bosch,
crosses a crowded sidewalk to his car and DRIVER. He's
suddenly intercepted by TWO MEN IN WINDBREAKERS. They take
his elbows and forcefully and without fuss guide him in
another direction.

107

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

107

Still dark. Clock reads 4 a.m. Webb props himself up. The
phone. Webb stares at it. A beat. It keeps ringing. Sue
stirs.

WEBB

(picks up)
Hello?

WEIL/PHONE

Gary, it's Fred Weil.

INTERCUT

108

INT. WEIL'S KITCHEN - PRE-DAWN

108

Weil sitting in his kitchen in the pre-dawn dark. In front of
him are copies of the Post, L.A. Times and New York Times.

WEIL

Well, you got far.
(realizing; grim)
Oh. You haven't seen the east coast
papers yet.

WEBB

It's four a.m..

Big silent beat. The other shoe about to drop.

WEIL

I was you once, Gary. I started down this road, but nowhere near as far as you are. They tried to kill me. I didn't tell you that part. My brakes failed, brand new car, imagine that.

(then)

But I wasn't going to stop, so they 'controversialized' me. Do you have any idea what I'm talking about?

WEBB

No.

WEIL

They turn you into the story. You have a history of schizophrenia, you're a liar, you're a homo, you beat your dog, you fuck around on your wife, you're a pedophile. It doesn't matter if none of it's true. The point is no one remembers what you found, they just remember you, and you're nuts. You cease to exist.

Out the window, the sky beginning to brighten.

WEIL (CONT'D)

They edited my testimony, Gary.

WEBB

I know.

WEIL

They cut the tape and rearrange it, and have me say any old thing they want.

(then)

WEIL (CONT'D)

But this is why I called. I wanted to tell you something my father told me.

(MORE)

WEIL (CONT'D)

He was an Air Force pilot, and when things got ugly for me he reminded me that you get the most flak when you're right over the target. That's when they empty all their guns into you. When you're about to drop a bomb on the Kremlin ... or in this case, the Central Intelligence Agency.

They sit there listening for each other a moment.

WEIL (CONT'D)

Gary? You there?

WEBB

I'm here.

WEIL

Just remember you're not alone. I just wanted to share that with you.

WEBB

Thank you.

WEIL

You hang in there, Gary.

Webb stares at his phone, as at a land mine he's stepped on.

SUE

Gary? Are you okay?

GARY

Yeah, I'm fine.

109

INT. MERCURY NEWS NEWSROOM, SAN JOSE - DAY

109

Webb crosses a subdued newsroom toward a glass conference room, where we see Ceppos, Dawn, Yarnold, EDITOR JONATHAN KRIM and the Merc's COUNSEL seated around the table.

Webb enters. Copies of the Post, NYT, LAT and Newsweek spread around. Webb's got his own copies under his arm.

WEBB

(takes in the subdued
energy of the room)
You guys don't look so good.

CEPPOS
Before we weigh in, Gary, we wanted
to hear your thoughts.

WEBB
About what?

CEPPOS
The CIA's response, for one.

WEBB
There isn't one.

CEPPOS
Any CIA sources?

WEBB
Operatives? Clerks? Spies? Who?

CEPPOS
I'll take anyone who takes home a
check from the CIA.

WEBB
It's a secretive organization,
Jerry. That's what they do.
Nothing. Not talk.

Webb picks up the Washington Post.

OUTSIDE COUNSEL
They're not saying our facts are
wrong.

WEBB
Because they're not. But what they
are saying is, We don't disagree
with Webb, we're just here to
attest to the moral purity of the
Central Intelligence Agency, but
we're not gonna tell you why.

KRIM
Gary. Walter Zuckerman is a two-
time Pulitzer winner.

WEBB
Who thinks his job is to defend the
CIA. Did you know he *worked* for the
CIA in the 70's? As a media intern?
He was on their payroll!

CEPPOS

Let's calm down, people.

WEBB

(picks up the LA Times)

The only people *these* guys have in *their* story are the former Director of the CIA, the current Director of the CIA, and a bunch of - guess who? - CIA officials. Not exactly a sample of objective opinion if you ask me.

(gestures to the papers)

Reading these is like reading Pravda circa 1953.

Webb looks around the room. The faces vaguely hostile.

WEBB (CONT'D)

What am I missing here?

DAWN

The story scares people.

WEBB

It should.

DAWN

It's the kind of thing people don't want to know.

WEBB

Which means it's the kind of thing we need to keep doing. Keep moving it, keep digging. We can tighten the screws on the drug pipelines. Maybe follow a particular load of dope and find out who smoked it, whose lives were ruined, etc--
(and looking at Dawn--)

They're all just looking at him. Webb confused.

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

(officious)

Gary, I don't want us in a war we can't win. We have other staff and their families to worry about, too.

WEBB

And what about *those* families? The ones who are drowning because of what those assholes did?

(he points out the window)

The entire legal system has been re-gamed to put those kids in jail for decades, for something a white kid in Jersey would get a wrist slap for.

(then)

No room in the lifeboat, is that it? An entire generation of inner city men is gone--

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

I just want us to take a breath before we send you anywhere else, or print anything else.

Dawn is handed a note.

WEBB

What is it?

DAWN

Dateline just cancelled their segment on the story.

110

INT. DAWN GARCIA'S OFFICE - MERC - SAN JOSE - CONTINUOUS

110

Webb follows Dawn in. Neither sits.

DAWN

Tomorrow the Post is going to say you're an active part of Ricky Ross's defense, that your involvement verges on complicity. That you and Ricky Ross are telling this fairy tale together.

(Webb starts to laugh)

It's not funny.

WEBB

C'mon, Dawn.

DAWN

We're fighting for our lives, Gary.

WEBB

We drew blood. They'll say anything.

DAWN

Would you?
(stunned silence)
I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

WEBB

Yes you did.
(starts to leave; stops)
You know what a reporter does, don't you Dawn?

DAWN

Yes I--

WEBB

Hunts. He hunts. Not with a high-powered rifle but a quiver of arrows. And you know what an editor does? The editor is the Lord waiting for the hunter in the safety of the castle. One organism. One doesn't exist or survive without the other. Not you without me. Not me without you.

(then)

It's my name on this story--
(he opens her office door -
the nameplate)
--but it's your name on this door.

HOLD on Dawn's face. Head drops, Webb walks, and--

111 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT., SACRAMENTO - NIGHT** 111

Webb enters. Looks shell-shocked.

112 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER** 112

Sue and Ian in the kitchen. Webb joins.

SUE

How goes the war?

WEBB
I'm not sure.

SUE
What does that mean?

WEBB
It means I'm not sure.

Beat. Sue stops, looks at him.

IAN
(shoveling in his food)
They're not like you. They're
pussies. They're just scared.

WEBB
Scared's okay. I expected scared.
It's like someone's telling them
something they hadn't thought of.

IAN
Like what?

WEBB
That it may not be true.

113

EXT. SUBURB OUTSIDE CLEVELAND - DAY

113

Peaceful suburban street. A FEMALE REPORTER gets out of a car, goes up the walk, knocks on the door to a pleasant little house. A MAN in his late 30's opens.

REPORTER
I'm sorry to bother you, but did
you know a reporter, used to work
for the Plain Dealer, named Gary
Webb?

THE MAN
(frowns)
My wife did.

REPORTER
I'm a reporter from New York. Is
your wife home?

THE MAN
She killed herself. But Webb knows
more about that than I do. Ask him.

114

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM- LIESEL CT. - ANOTHER NIGHT14

Webb, Sue and Dawn Garcia in the living room.

DAWN

I need to warn you before you come in tomorrow. The next week or so's going to be rough. Now Dateline thinks you lied to them, so they're coming after you. So is Nightline, and every major that hasn't had their shot yet.

Webb nods, stoic. Takes a breath.

WEBB

The story's tight.

DAWN

It's not perfect.

WEBB

Because I'm not done. I need to keep going. I need to finish, Dawn. I need you to protect me so I can finish what we started.

DAWN

It's not the story now. This is about you. The Times gave us a courtesy call. They went into everything, every corner and closet in your life ... every bar fight ... every speeding ticket ... every libel suit pinned on you--

IAN (O.S.)

What's going on?

Ian's in the doorway.

WEBB

Have a seat, pal.

DAWN

That's not a good idea.

Sue's seeing something else on Dawn's face.

SUE

(firm)

Ian, go upstairs.

When the boy leaves:

SUE (CONT'D)
They found out about that woman.

Dawn nods. Webb looks confused.

DAWN
The woman in Cleveland, Gary, at
the Plain Dealer. Why didn't you
tell us?

Dawn gets up, goes to the window. Eyes moist. Then reigns
herself in. Sets her face in a corporate mask.

DAWN (CONT'D)
Remember what I said about
credibility?

WEBB
You can take any life and pull it
apart, turn any hard-working good
life into a murder mystery.
(beseeching)
What about everything else? What
about the rest of me?

DAWN
There is no rest of you anymore.

115 **INT/EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - NIGHT** 115

Ian watches Webb walk Dawn to her car. Webb comes back. Stops
in front of his son. They HOLD a long look.

IAN
(straight, undeterred)
What happened in Cleveland?

116 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - GARAGE - NIGHT** 116

They have set up two old Barcaloungers before the Triumph, as
if for this purpose. Webb brings Ian a beer. They sit.

WEBB
There's no such thing as a little
mistake.
(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

One tiny tear in a parachute means you plunge to the earth. A pin-hole in a submarine can crush and sink you. You turn wrong, then you're lost, you turn trying to get home, and sometimes you just get more and more lost and farther from home.

IAN

You sound like the writer writing lines. I'm asking my father what happened in Cleveland.

WEBB

I fucked up.

IAN

Who was it?

WEBB

A reporter in the newsroom. She was pretty and she fell in love with me.

IAN

What was her name?

WEBB

Why does that matter?

IAN

It matters to me.

WEBB

Barbara.

IAN

Did you love her?

WEBB

No.

IAN

Did you love mom?

WEBB

I loved your mother. I love your mother.

(Ian confused)

I was lazy...and greedy. I was greedy. You always regret greed. Every time.

IAN
For how long?

WEBB
A year.

IAN
Dad.
(then)
Which year?

WEBB
You were twelve.

Ian starts to cry.

WEBB (CONT'D)
I broke it off. You and your mother
were -- are -- my entire life--

IAN
And then.

Long pause. This part's hard. Webb finishes his beer.

WEBB
She committed suicide.

IAN
(stunned)
That's really shitty.

WEBB
(struggling to keep his
composure)
Yes it was.

IAN
That's why we're here, in
California?
(Webb nods)
You ran away.

WEBB
We needed a new start.

IAN
We were fine. We had friends.
Grandpa and Grandma. Cleveland was
fine.

WEBB
Well, it's behind us now.

IAN
I'm disappointed in you. Mom's
amazing

There it is. The deepest cut. From his son.

WEBB
I understand.

Webb looks up. He hadn't seen her-- Sue, in the doorway, or just outside it.

Ian slips past her toward the house.

SUE
(brushes the boy's
shoulder)
You okay, honey?

IAN
Fine.
(he's not; he goes in)

She stands there staring at Webb.

WEBB
I'm sorry.

SUE
You promised me that all of that
stuff would stay back there in the
past. That it wouldn't enter the
kids' lives. You brought it home,
Gary. That was not the deal.

She walks away leaving Webb alone in the garage.

117

INT. MERCURY NEWS NEWSROOM, SAN JOSE - DAY

117

Webb enters. Makes his 'g'mornings'. Tight averted smiles.

He crosses to the conference room. Other side of the glass wall, a big crew awaits: Ceppos, Dawn, Yarnold, Krim, Counsel. Two or three other SUITS we've never seen. Another REPORTER (PETE CAREY, 38). Eight in total.

Webb enters, eyes on Dawn. She looks away--

WEBB

I think I have this figured out--
 (clocks Carey; at first a
 smile, then a suspicion)
 Pete. When did you get in from
 Washington?

DAWN

Just have a seat, Gary.

Dawn puts a cup of coffee in front of Webb. Webb sits. After a beat of awkward silence:

CEPPOS

There's no good way to say this, so
 I'm just going to say it.
 (then)
 We've made a difficult decision,
 Gary. We're going to print an open
 letter saying mistakes were made.

WEBB

Dawn, what's he talking about?

She averts her eyes.

KRIM

We had Pete backtrack some of your
 leads.

WEBB

Why the hell didn't you tell me?

CEPPOS

Everybody's on the line, Gary.

YARNOLD

We're out of our comfort zone.

WEBB

Yeah, okay, I know. But why the
 hell didn't you *just tell me*?

Long beat. No one wants to say what's next.

KRIM

We didn't like some of what Pete
 came back with.

(MORE)

KRIM (CONT'D)

(Webb waits)

Some of your sources have changed their stories.

WEBB

I'm sure they did.

KRIM

They're saying they never said what you have them saying.

WEBB

Yeah, that's how they operate.

KRIM

"They"?

WEBB

The Agency. They deny. *Everything*. Everyone who works with them *denies everything*.

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

Did you ever get an actual CIA operative on the record?

WEBB

What? No.

(to Dawn)

You know I didn't. It's impossible--

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

Did you ever get *anyone* who works for the CIA on the record?

WEBB

Who is this guy?

CEPPOS

Outside counsel.

Webb pauses. Takes in the sudden change in air pressure.

WEBB

Then as long as we're outside our comfort zone, let me remind you that the CIA doesn't just deny everything.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

When they need real-world moves made, bad moves or illegal moves, done in the name of the greater good, they use people who do work for the CIA, not people who work for the CIA. Get the difference?

All seem embarrassed for Webb.

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

OUTSIDE COUNSEL (CONT'D)

We don't operate in a courtroom, or in absolutes, Gary. We operate in shades of grey. Everybody in this room is tried by the power of public opinion.

WEBB

I didn't get that memo. I didn't realize the truth is a shade of grey.

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

It's not what you can prove; it's what people say they remember. Your word against theirs.

WEBB

Against the word of an army of convicted felons and liars.

CEPPOS

Would have been nice if we had some innocent people on the record, Gary.

Beat. Can't deny it. He's right.

WEBB

Call Norwin Meneses in Nicaragua.

CAREY

He said he never spoke to you.

Webb, stunned, drifts into his seat.

WEBB

What are you talking about? I was down there for three days--

DAWN

I know you were in Managua, Gary--

WEBB

It took me two days just to get
inside that prison--

CAREY

He said you never got inside. He
says he never saw you.

WEBB

Five hundred people saw me!

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

Can you prove it?

WEBB

What, you mean like did I keep my
ticket?

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

Do you have proof you were actually
inside that prison?

WEBB

I bribed my way in.

CEPPOS

Oh great.

WEBB

It's the third world, Jerry.
Everyone in that prison, from the
warden to the fucking gardener is a
criminal! That's why they're *in*
prison!

(then)

What about my notes?

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

Proof only that you wrote them. You
could have made them up later.

WEBB

Fuck you.

CEPPOS

Gary!

WEBB

No. Fuck you for insinuating I'd re-engineer a goddamn thing!

DAWN

Calm down, Gary--

CAREY

What about this Swiss banker--
(looks at his notes)
Bosch?

WEBB

What about him?

CAREY

I can't find him.

CEPPOS

No one's heard from him.

Webb looks to Dawn. She still can't meet his eyes.

WEBB

This is nuts.
(to the room)
The CIA can't overthrow a government without getting their dicks caught in their fly, but they are absolutely fantastic at this--

DAWN

Who is--?

WEBB

The CIA--
(getting it)
You all think I'm crazy. And a liar.

CEPPOS

Let's not make it personal.

WEBB

What's *not* personal about this?

CEPPOS

We got in this together, we'll get out of this together.

WEBB

Get out of it?

Then, from the top of the table:

YARNOLD

Gary, we're going to kill the story.

Long beat.

KRIM

There's a bigger picture. Open your eyes.

Webb gets up. To the window. Turns to Dawn. To the room.

WEBB

My eyes are open. And you know what picture I see? I see a bunch of criminals posing as civil servants covering their asses. I see a government agency committing criminal acts abroad and lighting fires at home. You know what I see in this room? I see a bunch of people worried about their reputations, terrified the Post and the Times won't pluck them from the foothills of the San Jose Mercury-News and offer them a job on the mountaintop after all.

(silence; then)

You print that letter and I see fiction become reality. You do that once, just one time, you don't undo it. Not ever. And then that's what you are. You're a newspaper that tells the truth - unless you don't feel like it.

He stares across the table at Dawn. Holds that a long beat.

WEBB (CONT'D)

(just)

Dawn.

(nothing)

I'm not stopping. With or without you--

CEPPOS

(as if Webb hadn't spoken)

Gary. There's something else.

119

EXT. WEBB HOME - DAY

119

The street strung with lights and plastic snow men. Fake snow.

The whole Webb family stands around Webb's TR-6. It's packed to the windows with plastic bags of clothes, boxes of books, Webb's computer.

IAN

I mean, what the hell's in Cupertino?

WEBB

The paper's bureau for losers.
Where I won't get in trouble.
(stage wink)
Or so they think.
(making the best of it)
They got me set up in a nice little apartment.

CHRISTINE

Maybe just don't go, daddy.

WEBB

(scoops her up)
We just got this house to pay for, Christmas is coming up, all that, baby. And look at all these teeth that are gonna need straightening and fixing.

Webb looks up at the house.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Home every weekend, promise. It's just for a little while, guys.

Webb's been avoiding Sue's face.

WEBB (CONT'D)

It was go to Siberia or resign.

SUE

You're not resigning.

She picks up a box that she packed and hands it to him.

SUE (CONT'D)

Pictures. Some stuff of ours. Some of my favorite books.

(MORE)

SUE (CONT'D)

(then)

Letters. My love letters.
I put some of Christina's drawings
in there, too--

(then)

Make it a home. Don't give up.

WEBB

(tears up)

I don't want to be alone. I hate
being alone.

SUE

I know, Gary--

WEBB

I like working at my desk, hearing
you and the kids making noise on
the other side of the door, knowing
you're there.

SUE

Maybe some time away is a good
thing.

Sue puts the box in his hands.

SUE (CONT'D)

You're gonna be fine. We're with
you. We're cheering you on.

120 **EXT. MOTEL - CUPERTINO, CA - DAY**

120

Webb's TR-6 pulls into a crappy S.R.O. motel with a murky
pool. Christmas lights saggy and dim. Fake plastic reindeer
drink from the pool.

121 **INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - SAME**

121

Webb enters a room barely big enough for a chair, a bed, the
cheap dresser, and the TV/VCR combo on the tilted swivel. The
furniture is old, re-upholstered-one-too-many-times.

WEBB

(drops his bags)

Wow. A VCR.

122 **INT. MERC BUREAU - STRIP MALL, CUPERTINO - DAY** 122

Webb walks in. Three AGING REPORTERS look up from threadbare desks. Could be phone salesmen pitching cruises to Barbados. Webb crosses to an empty desk. Puts down his bag.

A123 **INT MERC. BUREAU - STRIP MALL, CUPERTINO - TIME CUT** A123

Webb at his desk, On the phone. One of the reporters across from him plays a noisy annoying video game on his computer.

WEBB

(into phone)

--Yeah, the Mercury-News. Look, I'm told the police department is having trouble keeping it's troopers' horses healthy--

(then)

Well what I heard was bowel trouble -- constipation--

(reaches for a notepad)

Is that the entire troop, or just a few horses in particular--?

123 **INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - NIGHT** 123

PAN THE WALLS

Where Webb has reassembled the entire Dark Alliance story. And more. The massive jumbled wallpaper of notes - but tripled. Names, a dates, numbers.

Webb on the bed. Has been on the phone. Dialing for dollars. A list of names, numbers, before him. All but a few crossed out.

He gets up, walks to the wall. Moves a few cards around. Shuffling the deck chairs.

124 **INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - ANOTHER NIGHT** 124

Another night. An open bottle of wine sits to the side. Webb and Sue naked under the chintzy covers. He leans into her, kisses her neck. Nothing happens. Sue looks at him. They make a feeble attempt at foreplay. It's not happening.

A longer beat. Still nothing happens.

WEBB

I'm sorry.

SUE

About what?

She gets up, wraps herself in a towel. She wanders to the wall. To his paper maze of connections and theories. It's grown. Maybe by a third. She sees a PHOTO of CORAL BOCA next to RAFFIE CORNEJO.

SUE (CONT'D)

I thought it was horses.

WEBB

I filed a mesmerizing exclusive this morning about pot-hole fillage.

She then sees the box. The one she gave him full of their family stuff. Tape still sealed. Unopened.

SUE

You didn't even open it.

WEBB

Open what?

SUE

Didn't even take us out of the box.

Webb gets out of bed, walks to the wall. He looks at all of his work.

WEBB

(re: the story)
I need more time.

SUE

And then what?

WEBB

And then it's done.

Sue sits down on the bed.

SUE

And then what?

Long beat.

WEBB

I didn't choose what's happening.

SUE

Yes you did. You chose this. You chose that woman in Cleveland. And she died. And you chose the corrupt City Council of Cleveland. And I lose you for a year. And now this story, and the one before this story. And there will be a next story, and I'll lose you to some other asshole, and maybe his girlfriend.

(then)

I'm never going to have all of you.

Silence. He doesn't deny it.

WEBB

I don't want to be here.

(re: the room)

In this shit place.

SUE

Do you remember the letter you wrote me when we first met?

WEBB

The one where I corrected your grammar. You hated that.

SUE

No.

A sweet smile. Then --

SUE (CONT'D)

It's the one where you wrote --
"Words were created to tell of inner happenings, not feelings. What I feel for you is too important and delicate for words. A touch or a look between us is the only way to really know what's true."

She takes his hand.

SUE (CONT'D)

You were eighteen. We were eighteen.

WEBB

I remember.

SUE

You already knew what was true.

(then)

I just want you to want me as much
as you want all of that.

(re: the story, Coral)

More than you needed her. And
people like her.

(long beat)

But it's never going to happen.

Stop. There it is.

SUE (CONT'D)

You are who you always were, Gary.
No blame. No judgement. It's just a
fact.

(then)

It's me who changed.

WEBB

What are you saying?

SUE

I don't know.

WEBB

Yes, you do.

Then:

SUE

You're right, I do.

She gets dressed.

125

EXT. MOTEL - CUPERTINO - ANOTHER DAY

125

Now Webb's motorcycle parked next to his car, between his
room and the rancid pool. More Christmas stuff. Tinsel.

126

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - DAY- CONTINUOUS

126

More of his shit has shown up. Photos of the kids. His motorcycle helmet and jacket. Little fake Christmas tree in the corner. Home.

Now, he takes the family stuff out of the box, puts his kid's pictures on the desk. Takes the old love letters out of the box. Reads them.

CUT TO:

Later. End of day. Webb's alone, sitting in a T-shirt and sweat pants. He smokes, drinks some Maker's Mark. He's staring at the phone. One of his notebooks is open on his lap. He dials a number. Recording - *this phone line has been disconnected..beep beep ...* he hangs up. Dials another line, checks his notes. The line rings and rings--

127

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - LATE NIGHT

127

Webb in boxers only, sleeps. He stirs, slowly wakes up, looks-

-- A SILHOUETTED figure is standing in front of him. Webb freaks, tries to turn on the light --

MAN

Don't turn on the light.

Webb stops. He tries to get a better look at the man.

WEBB

Are you here to kill me?

MAN

No, but I'm surprised you're not dead by now.

(then)

I'm Lawrence Harrison. Do you know that name?

WEBB

I've seen it. I don't remember where.

HARRISON

Most of the time it's redacted.
Most of the time I don't exist.

(then)

(MORE)

HARRISON (CONT'D)
 I know what you're trying to do.
 It's about goddamn time.

Harrison looks at the walls. The notes. The desolation.

HARRISON (CONT'D)
 You needed to talk to me six months
 ago.

LATER -- Now HARRISON is seated near the bed. There's just enough light in the room to make him out. He's a very TALL MAN. Worn. Late 50's. Webb is still in bed but seated upright. Vulnerable.

HARRISON (CONT'D)
 I was recruited out of Berkeley. I knew Spanish and law and wanted to do good, fight some evil empire, taste power. I took the spot in Mexico City. We all wanted the power but we wouldn't admit it. That would be sordid. So we talk about the national interest, fighting the enemy.

WEBB
 (confirming)
 The Agency ... When you joined the Central Intelligence Agency.

Harrison simply nods.

HARRISON
 I made nice with radicals and slept with some of the pretty ones, and then I turned in their names.
 (pause)
 Then I started noticing that they were all disappearing. Even the girls. Permanently. Everyone I touched - every girl I slept with - got dead.

Harrison is now upset.

HARRISON (CONT'D)
 (losing his precision)
 The people we hunted, murdered - all they had was this deep desire to reform the government and have free elections. That's it ...
 (MORE)

HARRISON (CONT'D)

One of these girls was 18 and all she did was *blow* a lefty. She was beautiful. Big wide smile. They cut off her tits and her head.

WEBB

You confirmed these people actually died?

HARRISON

Instead of *sorta* died?

WEBB

I need to be sure. I need to make sure.

HARRISON

You don't need anything. You're done. I'm here to make you feel momentarily good.

(continuing the story)

So I moved on. I became the communications director of a major drug cartel. Early Medellin. Back then they were small. I helped in little ways, solved logistical issues. Paved the way.

WEBB

So you left the Agency?

HARRISON

My payroll stub didn't say CIA, if that's what you mean.

WEBB

So technically you don't work for the CIA. But there's someone in Washington who knows what you do and is not stopping you from doing it. Not just not stopping you. Stopping anyone trying to stop you.

(then)

So I'll ask you again. When you went to work for the cartel, did you leave the Agency?

(silence)

I'll take that as a no.

HARRISON

It's all lies and corruption. That's what power really feels like, whether you're directing murders for your government, or crossing the desert to slaughter a man whose only crime is to know too much. You're attracted to the power and then you become addicted to the power and then you are a slave to the power. And then you are devoured by the power.

WEBB

These two things -- your thing and my thing--

HARRISON

It all looks so vast it's impossible to understand, so it can't be true. You'll look crazy if you say it's true. You already look crazy. You're *un-American*.

(pause)

But this is the thing, this is the thing, this is the thing: it's really very simple. Very uncomplicated. So simple a child could understand it.

WEBB

(quieter now; already knows the answer; staring down at the table)

Are they connected?

HARRISON

You are a good reporter. But not a great one. You have too much arrogance. He need to be small before your story. In awe of what you find.

(then the give)

Yes, they are the same thing.

Webb's eyes closed. There it is. Finally. Harrison takes an envelope out of his pocket and tosses it on the table.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

Danilo Blandon. Taken yesterday.

Photos of a beach front manse. Sprinklers sparkling. A metallic 7-series BMW. Blandon -- tan and fit, country club whites -- and a GORGEOUS WHITE GIRL, 19, up front.

WEBB

Why are you showing me this?

HARRISON

Because I know you want to see it.

This is him. And this--

(the shitty motel room)

Is you. No one wants to hear your small sad story. No one will

believe it. Get out now.

128

EXT. CONDO - SAN JOSE - NEARLY MORNING

128

Webb on his bike - full throttle - through a quiet suburban street. It's 5 o'clock. Pulls up to a modest but neat condo complex for young professionals and starter families.

Cuts the motor. Numbing silence. Not even the dogs are barking.

Crosses to a door and rings the bell. He rings again.

DAWN (O.S.)

Who is it?

WEBB

It's Gary.

Long beat. Dawn's not sure she should. Then she opens the door. She's in a robe. Not until she sees Webb do her eyes focus.

DAWN

Gary. It's five in the morning.

WEBB

You don't look happy to see me.

DAWN

I'm in my pajamas.

WEBB

I found him.

DAWN

Found who?

WEBB

The operative. The CIA--

DAWN

Gary--

WEBB

Dawn! It's what you kept asking for! The one thing I didn't have. I can keep going now.

(waits; silence)

He was in the middle--

DAWN

Gary--

WEBB

He was part of the operation. It was worse than we thought. He'll confirm everything.

*
*
*
*

Pause, then--

DAWN

It's over.

WEBB

I told you I wasn't giving up on it.

DAWN

But we are.

(then)

I'm just trying to keep you on payroll. I'm trying to save your life.

WEBB

I'm not going to pretend just so I can cash your check --

DAWN

I understand, Gar --

WEBB

(he keeps going)

-- I'm not going to stop. I'm going to finish this --

DAWN

Okay.

WEBB

For you. Or somebody else--

DAWN

Okay.

WEBB

Okay.
 (then)
 Good night.

Dawn nods. Sad. Can't look him in the eyes.

DAWN

'night, Gary-

And closes the door. Then locks the door. Webb doesn't move. Waits looking at the closed door as if at a person. Until the door says nothing and he simply turns and goes.

129

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - DAY

129

Webb is slouched in his chair in front of a computer. Exhausted. In a daze. He hasn't changed. The blah-ness is soul crushing.

The phone is ringing. The machine picks up.

MERC REPORTER/PHONE (LEAVING MESSAGE)

Gary, it's Wanda at the office. I have a bunch of while-you-were-outs here for you. School Board meeting was last night. Thought you were covering that one. New football scoreboard and all that, remember? ... Um-- ... We haven't seen you in a couple days, Gary. You okay? Check in, okay? ... Okay. Bye.

Webb doesn't register the call. He's typing. We SEE what he's typing: *"To whom it may concern, Sadly, circumstances and editorial conduct have led me to the conclusion that my only response must be my immediate resignation as Senior Investigative Reporter for the San Jose Mercury-News--"*

130

EXT. MOTEL - CUPERTINO - DAY

130

Webb steps out for air. Lights a cigarette. Tips his face back to the sun. Catharsis. Relief. Grief. All there on his face.

Opens his eyes. Tamps out the stub. Now notices - the parking space in front of him.

WEBB
 Where's my bike?
 (now panicked)
 WHERE'S MY FUCKING BIKE??

He walks out into the street. Looks around. Nothing. Fuck!

He walks back to his car, panicky, looking around. He starts slapping at his car door, punching, crying--

WEBB (CONT'D)
 WHERE'S MY FUCKING BIKE??!

As his fist goes through a pane of glass - up to his arm - skin tearing - blood --

WEBB (CONT'D)
 Fuck you! Fuck you!

He kicks his car. Some people come out of their rooms and watch.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 (re:onlookers, Webb shows his teeth)
 What are you looking at?! What the fuck are you looking ?!

131

INT./EXT. WEBB'S CAR/WEBB HOME - ANOTHER DAY

131

Healing from his self-beating, arm/hand bandaged, Webb pulls up in his TR-6. In a tux. A fifth of Maker's Mark between his knees.

He stares up at his house a long beat. He tosses a vicodin into his mouth, dry swallows. Winces from his wounds.

He reaches for the door, rings the bell.

Door opens on Eric and Christine. The kids press their faces and hands to the screen. Webb touches his fingers to theirs.

WEBB
 My loves.

CHRISTINE
 Why aren't you coming in, daddy?

Ian appears in his SUIT. He and Webb HOLD a long look.

IAN
What happened?

WEBB
Long story.

IAN
What's going on?
(then)
Are you still my dad?

WEBB
Of course I'm your dad.

IAN
Are you still married to mom or
not?

WEBB
Yes. But it's complicated.

IAN
No it's not. You're my father or
you're not.

WEBB
You're my son, Ian.

Webb opens the door. Hugs Ian.

IAN
I'll tell mom you're outside.

Ian walks deep into the house.

Webb goes back to the car, tips back a mouthful of whisky.
Sue and Ian come out. Sue in a black slip dress. Sexy. Webb
lightens up.

WEBB
Whoa! You look fantastic!

Sue gets in, sees the bottle of Maker's. She takes a swig.

SUE
I look fantastic.

Hands the bottle back to Webb.

WEBB
I'm keeping the story going. I have
new sources. New information--

SUE
(an envelope on the dash)
What's that?

She unfolds a letter. "To whom it may concern." Her eyes moisten. She touches her mouth. Her eyes. She looks at him.

SUE (CONT'D)
The paper know?

WEBB
Not yet.

Her eyes scan to the bottom. To his signature.

SUE
Gary.
(then)
Maybe this is okay. Maybe this part has to happen. Walk away. Start over. Somewhere else. So the next thing can happen--

WEBB
It's not okay. It's very fucking far from okay.

SUE
You're a great reporter. You're an important guy, Gary--

WEBB
(the letter)
Feels like my death warrant.

SUE
Don't be dramatic.

WEBB
Funny, it's like he knew something about me--
(what--)
My first editor at the Post. He told me there's no way back. That when a reporter stops being a reporter he turns in more than his press card. He gives up his youth, he gives up his fun, he gives up the only thing he ever wanted to be ... And the troubles begin.

Sue is silently crying. Webb leans over, kisses Sue's neck. Collapses into her a little. She wants to hold him. She can't hold him. She wants to hold him, when--

IAN

Hey--!

He's rolling the finished and assembled motorcycle out from the garage. He coasts on it, down to their car.

WEBB

Wow. Holy shit.
(the bike)
My man.

IAN

(the envelope)
What's that?

Webb repacks the letter.

WEBB

(brave)
It means everything to me you guys
are coming.

IAN

I'll follow, 'kay? I'm right behind
you, dad.

SUE

He's right behind you--

132

EXT. BALLROOM, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - LATER

132

TIGHTEN on a placard: "AMERICAN SOCIETY OF JOURNALISTS:
JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR." Cocktail crowd milling about.

Webb, Sue and Ian off to the side with the SOCIETY DIRECTOR.

SOCIETY DIRECTOR

There's no point not being straight
with you. The board wanted to take
this away. But I fought for you,
and not because I felt sorry for
you. I believe you. And you were
abandoned. And I'm ashamed. I'm
ashamed for everyone in this room
who's watching you burn. That's
just about everybody. Now--

(MORE)

SOCIETY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
 (looks into the ballroom)
 --that's going to be a tough room.
 But tonight's your night. I want
 you to know that.

WEBB
 Thank you.

SOCIETY DIRECTOR
 Nobody deserves your thanks.
 (to Ian)
 You should be proud of your dad.
 Real proud.
 (back to Webb)
 Good luck.

133 **INT. BATHROOM - RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - NIGHT** 133

Webb in a stall. Opens a prescription bottle. Vicodin. Webb winces at the pain in his hand. Throws back a pill. Dry swallow.

134 **INT. BALLROOM, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - NIGHT** 134

Webb winds his way forward through a packed house. 500 national reporters, editors, newscasters, TV producers.

And they're on their feet, wildly applauding. Webb grinning. Victory. Sue at the Mercury News table beaming with pride. Dawn Garcia and Jerry Ceppos toasting him.

Webb takes a step up on-stage, blinks ... turns to his triumph, and we

CUT BACK TO

135 **INT. BALLROOM, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - CONTINUOUS** 135

The real room. Only 100 people. Politely clapping.

At the Merc table, Dawn, Ceppos, Krim, etc. staring at their food.

On every face the expression of someone watching a car begin to spin out of control at 70 MPH. Someone call the cops.

Webb at the podium. Webb's eyes land on Sue. Her brave face.

Now Ian looking to Gary for a lifeline. Webb nods, Gonna be fine. Pulls out remarks. Clears his throat. About to start.

Then stops. It's like he now can't read. He tosses his notes away. The room excruciatingly silent. Sue staring. What are you doing? This isn't you.

WEBB

(ad libbing)

You know, my first story was about a dog that shoulda died but wouldn't. I was twenty-two. It was a stupid little feature, but I was proud of it, and I put it in a frame and hung it up, and believed I joined a secret guild of reporters. If there ever was a true believer, it was me.

Some in the audience are nodding.

WEBB (CONT'D)

My last story - I filed it just this morning - was about a police horse in Cupertino, California that died of constipation.

He gets a gust of relieved laughter.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Actually, that's not a joke.

(laughs at himself)

But start with a dog, end with a pile of horseshit. There's a kind of poetry to that, isn't there?

(then)

Well, that's bullshit--

He smiles into the room. People are staring at their shoes.

WEBB (CONT'D)

(long pause; looks out at the audience; rising anger)

Look, I am not going to lie for you people. I have gotten people pissed at me over the years.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

But I was never fired, I never got any death threats -- none I took seriously -- and my editors never threw me under the bus.

(the discomfort in the room grows)

Now I see it's because I never wrote anything that really mattered. Mattered in a way that matters to lots and lots of people. Matters in a scary way.

(then)

I am not going to give you what you want. I am not going to take it back and beg for my job and wag my tail. I am not going to make you feel better. Fuck that--

He and Dawn HOLD a look.

WEBB (CONT'D)

I thought my job was to tell the public the truth. The facts, pretty or not. And let the publishing of facts make a difference in how people look at things, at themselves, and at what they stand for.

Long silence.

WEBB (CONT'D)

But shame on me--

(rising anger now)

I know something I didn't know before. I now know there are stories that are too true to tell. Who made you the arbiters of what the world should and should not know? Who made any of us God?

Webb stares out at the Merc table. At Dawn and Ceppos. Then over at the LA Times table -- Rich Kline twisting a napkin.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Thank you. This is the only thing I ever wanted to do. And for a while, for a long while, it was an honor. Truly.

Webb simply turns and leaves the stage. Tepid applause.

He heads for the Merc table, drops an envelope - the resignation letter - in front of Ceppos. And walks on, away from us, through the awkward silence. Through the doors--

136

INT. BALLROOM LOBBY, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO

136

--and stops. Standing alone in the middle of the lobby. Steps for the wall, reaches for it, and just drifts down to the floor. Sitting there on the floor in shock like some sort of accident victim.

After a long beat, the doors swing open. Ian steps out.

IAN

You okay?

They trade a look. Webb naked to the world, before his son.

WEBB

I'm not sure.

He tries not to cry.

IAN

I'm proud of you.

WEBB

Thanks, buddy.

Sue walks out from the main room. out the doors. She sees Ian and Gary. Some people follow her out from the room.

Webb walks over to her for a private moment.

WEBB (CONT'D)

I've done things I don't like. I became a guy I don't totally understand.

(pause)

But I never stopped loving you. Not once.

SUE

I know.

WEBB

I need some air.

SUE

Okay.

IAN
Dad! Don't go too far.

But Webb, lost in his own world, keeps going...

Some people come up to Sue. They say hello. She has one eye on them, and one on Gary as he pushes through the doors. FADE TO WHITE --

-- the white now BURNS to a hot core. We're staring into lights. Fluorescent. Screen burns out. Now--

137 **OMIT** 137

CUT TO:

138 **INT. NEWS FOOTAGE** 138

NEWS FOOTAGE OF THE MONICA LEWINSKY SCANDAL BREAKING ON TV NEWS CHANNELS ACROSS THE GLOBE -- CLINTON NEWS CONFERENCE, PICTURES OF LEWINSKY as--

BACK TO MORE LEWINSKY. ALL LEWINSKY ALL THE TIME -- talking head upon talking head, EXCEPT FOR:

FOOTAGE OF LOCAL COVERAGE near the end of the half-hour. Something about--

CIA DUMPS MASSIVE PILE OF OBSCURE DOCUMENTS revealing a complex role in the civil wars of Central America -- mistakes made -- apparently known drug traffickers were used, employed -- tons and tons of cocaine crossing American borders --

A FLURRY OF THIS -- AND LEWINSKY -- but LOST. Noise atop orchestrated layers of noise with no beginning or end until the "news" comes at us like nonsensical Tom & Jerry cartoon. Palp. Peripheral. Gone, as--

139 **EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY** 139

IAN NOW RIDES his motorcycle SCREAMING up rolling hills, god's country --

CRAWL

** Gary Webb never got another job in journalism again.*

** The CIA waited two years, then, amidst the chaotic distraction of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, released without explanation a 400 pp. document admitting to all of Webb's accusations and beyond. Not one of the nation's major newspapers or networks gave the confession coverage.*

** Shortly after, Gary Webb committed suicide, shooting himself in the head.*

** The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and New York Times stand by their stories on Webb, Dark Alliance, and the CIA-Cocaine connection to this day.*

140

EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY

140

Ian now climbing a long rise, beyond it sky -- he's cresting -
- summiting -- Beneath him now nothing but a lush
undulating sea of trees to the horizon --

FADE OUT