



Kill The Messenger

Directed by:
Michael Cuesta

Screenplay by:
Peter Landesman

Produced by:
Scott Stuber, Naomi Despres, Peter Landesman

Cast:
Jeremy Renner

Credits not contractual

London: 26 Aybrook Street, London W1U 4AN Tel: 020 3 618 5733, Fax: 0203 618 5740

New York: 65 Bleecker Street, 3rd Fl, New York, NY 10012 Tel: (212) 539-4000, Fax: (212) 358-4711

Los Angeles: 100 Universal City Plaza, Bldg 9128/2-R, Universal City, CA 91608 Tel: (818) 777 7373, Fax: (818) 866 4608

CARD 1:

"We live in a dirty and dangerous world. There are some things the general public does not need to know and shouldn't. Democracy flourishes when the government can take legitimate steps to keep its secrets and when the press can decide whether to print what it knows."

--Katherine Graham, publisher of the Washington Post, during a speech at CIA headquarters, 1988.

CARD 2:

This is a true story.

FADE IN:

INT. CITY MORGUE - SACRAMENTO, CA - DAY

Two clean-cut MEN IN SUITS - Agents of some sort, Federal - at a pane of observation glass, watching a MORGUE ATTENDANT open a refrigerator door. With the Attendant, a WOMAN and YOUNG MAN: SUE WEBB, 40, blond, very pretty; her son, IAN, 18

On the slab, the body of GARY WEBB: 37, ash blond, handsome, masculine. Two bullet wounds behind the left ear.

AGENT #1
Okay yeah that's Webb.

AGENT #2
Did we do this?

AGENT #1
Report says suicide.

AGENT #2
Can someone actually shoot himself
in the head twice?

They contemplate that.

AGENT #1
That the wife?

AGENT #2
Probably. The oldest kid.
(checks his notebook)
Ian maybe.

Beat.

AGENT #1
I knew a guy once who shot himself
in the heart twice.

AGENT #2
I guess you gotta really wanna die.

AGENT #1
Doesn't matter. As long as it's
him.

NOW UNDER AND THROUGH OPENING CREDITS--

SHUFFLE through a kaleidoscope of jump cut images and footage from the War on Drugs, both familiar and distant:

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

PRESIDENT NIXON/FOOTAGE
(intoning)
Drugs are public enemy number one--

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

TO DEA AGENTS SEIZING a mountain of stacked 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 wall-ful 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.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LONG BEACH, CA - MORNING

A no-man's land in the shadow of a fallow energy plant. 100 LAPD, DEA and L.A. COUNTY SHERIFFS check heavy weaponry at a staging area. Prep for a mass raid.

TITLE: JULY 15, 1995

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

Beach front. BMW in every drive. Sprinklers sparkling.

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

Door finally opens on RONALD LISTER, 40, half-asleep, nose collapsed from a lifetime of blow. LITTLE HOTTIE, 17, in tow.

LISTER
Who the fuck--?

WEBB
Gary Webb. San Jose Mercury-News.

LISTER
What do you want?

WEBB
Remember, the story on government seizure of property of, uh, accused narcotics dealers--

LISTER
(hands over heart)
Who, me? Yeah yeah that's me. The accused ... c'mon in...

INT. L.A. SHERIFF CRUISER

Swerving in and out of morning gridlock...Sheriffs in back pinching on kevlar.

INT. FAUX SPANISH MANSION

Lister walking Webb inside. The house barely has any furniture in it. Webb sniffs.

Cleaning and paint equipment piled in the corner.

LISTER
Spring cleaning. Coffee?

WEBB
This the house they're taking?

LISTER
I'm optimistic.

WEBB
What're the charges--?
(checks his notebook)
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?

LISTER
Signals, man. Blocks microwave and radio.

The girl rolls her eyes and - still naked - crosses to the coffee machine. Webb keeps looking at the girl's ass.

LISTER (CONT'D)
My last house - this sweet pad in Laguna - those charges didn't stick and they still didn't give it back.

WEBB
Why didn't they stick?

LISTER
Don't you know? I work for the Central Intelligence Agency, man.

Webb pockets his notebook, annoyed.

WEBB
I got up at four this morning for this.

He takes coffee from Naked Girl. Now what the hell - he takes in the girl. All of her. Fantastic body.

LISTER
What the hell're you doing?

Webb displays his left hand. A shiny ring.

WEBB
Relax. I'm married.

LISTER
So what. So am I.

THE DOOR EXPLODES

COPS/AGENTS/SHERIFFS
(pouring in)
D.E.A.! ... Los Angeles Sheriff
Department! ... Do not move!

LISTER
Christ. Here we go again.

The girl screams and runs.

COPS/AGENTS/SHERIFFS
Get that bitch!! ... Down
motherfuckers, down!!

Agents fan out. Drug dogs. Lister gives Webb a funny smile.

LISTER
Bad timing.

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

SHERIFF 1
Ronald J. Lister, we have a warrant
for your arrest for distribution of
cocaine, money laundering, wire
fraud--

Lister's up against the wall. Somewhere a window shatters.

LISTER
Whoa whoa just fucking whoa! This
is a family neighborhood!
(assumes the position)
Alright! Jesus!
(then)
Hey, I was supposed to brew you
guys some joe. Coffee anybody?

Webb almost out the door, when--

SHERIFF 1
Who the fuck are you!?

He's talking to Webb. A gun muzzle against his temple.

WEBB

Hold on --

Webb reaching for an ID, something, anything ... then -
someone screams "Hands!!"

And Webb's feet are kicked out, he's mid-air, then dropped on
ass and back. Handcuffed before he can utter sound.

WEBB (CONT'D)

I'm a reporter--!

DEA AGENT

Shut the fuck up!

LISTER

You don't know what you're messing
with, man. I know why you're
here...

(cuffs tight)

Ow. Hey ... But *why* are you here?

SHERIFF 1

What is he talking about?

LISTER

Cuz none of this is gonna matter.

AGENTS come back with an assault rifle, shotgun.

DEA AGENT

(to Webb)

Where's the dope?

WEBB

I'm the *reporter*.

LISTER

I knew you guys were coming two
days ago.

Sheriff 1 hands DEA Agent a radio.

COP/RADIO

It's a burn. Dope's gone.

DEA AGENT

All targets?

COP/RADIO

All fourteen.

SHERIFF 1
Everything here's sanitized, fresh
paint, new carpet. Like they knew
we were coming.

Webb -- cheek to floor -- looks across at Lister.

WEBB
You knew.

DEA AGENT
Fuck!

LISTER
You are not listening. I work for
your *boss's* boss, man. I got the
word two freakin' days ago. They're
letting me do this shit!

The DEA Agent slams the cleaning equipment against the wall.

LISTER (CONT'D)
(to Webb)
They're not listening.

WEBB
I am.

EXT. LIESEL CT, SACRAMENTO - WEBB'S BLOCK - ESTABLISHING

A street of kit-homes, checkerboard lawns, American flags.
We're in the heart of the lower-middle.

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

A local HOCKEY CREW - post-game, still in their jerseys -
around a pool out back. Webb at the grill, knuckles raw,
upper lip smeared with dried blood.

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

IAN
Back off--

Webb's kid, 16. Spitting image. Youngest player by 15 years.

And there's Sue - 35, blonde, fit and very pretty - with their other two: ERIC, 12; and CHRISTINE, 8.

And the other guys and their WIVES and KIDS. Boom box playing something incongruously soulful, Bill Evans.

Dave puts a beer in Ian's hand.

SUE
He's sixteen, Dave.

Webb hands Sue the spatula--

WEBB
Check this, fellas.

Leads them to the garage. There's Webb's Honda Interceptor, hottest of motorcycles. Next to it, 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 him in a headlock.

WEBB (CONT'D)
Goddamn infant day before yesterday.

Sue sticks her head in. Phone in her hand.

SUE
Hey. Yeah you. Hotshot.
(Webb looks up; her face falls at the sight of the second bike)
Gary goddammit we talked about this!

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

Webb tangoes across the garage. Sue wards him off.

WEBB (CONT'D)
I've waited for this, you know? The perfect ride.
(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

S'been sitting up here in my head
for sixteen years. My boy and me
riding to the ocean and touching
the water, 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 this, Ian? To be
full of shit like your dad?

IAN

Yeah. I wanna ride to the ocean and-

SUE

Touch the water. 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

So touching.

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

SUE (CONT'D)

It's the paper.

Webb takes the phone into--

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Reporter's lair, a quasi-organized chaos of boxes and files.
A slew of journalism awards, including a crystal Pulitzer ...
framed stories of Webb's 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".

DAWN/PHONE
In trouble again--?

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

WEBB
(into phone)
Only when it's absolutely
necessary.
(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 fudge the whole
point. The government takes away
these people's shit - their houses,
their cars, their goddamn furniture
- *forever... before they're*
convicted.

DAWN
C'mon.

WEBB
Even if they're acquitted they
can't get their stuff back. It's
unconstitutional.

DAWN
They're drug dealers, Gary.

WEBB
Who have rights. Because this is
America. That's the story.

DAWN

Isn't it a little odd asking our readers to sympathize with drug dealers?

Pause. Webb contemplates the fish in the aquarium.

WEBB

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. We just tell what happens.

DAWN

And when you find out something you really didn't want to know?

WEBB

That's not our call.

DAWN

Four minutes.

WEBB

Take my name off the story.

DAWN

Gary.

WEBB

Your move.

DAWN

(long silence; stalemate)
They were right about you. You're talented as hell. But an asshole.

Dawn hangs up. Webb leans back with a beer.

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - NEXT MORNING

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, legs pouring onto the floor. Ian nudges him with his toe--

IAN
Six-thirty.

And heads to the front door. Picks the *Mercury-News* off the stoop. Starts reading Webb's front page story.

IAN (CONT'D)
Dad.
(Webb grunts)
You ever gonna go back to your room?

WEBB
Ask your mother.

As Sue passes by.

SUE
That's none of your business. Gary,
it's none of his business.

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

IAN
(island of calm in)
Dad, you hang with some insanely bad people.

WEBB
Funny thing about bad guys. They're usually more honest than good guys. And a lot more fun. It's an inside-out world.

SUE
Life lessons by Gary Webb. Stick it on a poster.

IAN
Mom, you have to read this.

Sue says nothing. Webb plants a kiss on the back of her neck.

WEBB
I'm going to get you a bigger place.

ERIC
But we just got here.

WEBB

My woman needs a better kitchen.

SUE

How're you going to do that, Gary?

(beat; they look at each
other; quieter)

Are we even going to be together in
a year?

WEBB

Yeah. And the year after that.

(then)

Gotta go gotta go gotta roll,
munchkins!

CHRISTINE

Dad's taking us?

WEBB

Dad's taking you. Train leaves in
five ... four ...

Sue watches Gary and the kids pour into his shitty little TR
6. Fights back a smile at the chaos.

Then picks up the paper. And starts to read.

INT. NEWS BUREAU - SACRAMENTO - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Webb strides around a square of hallways housing the
California bureaus of the major national newspapers.

Bustling and loud. Past the Los Angeles Times suite (huge,
lots of REPORTERS); New York Times (plush and stately);
Washington Post (beautiful and big).

And bangs into--

INT. SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS BUREAU - SACRAMENTO - SAME

The Merc. Cramped and thread-bare, country cousins to the
majors. TOMMY FARRAGHER and MITCH BENSON, 30's, doughy Irish
guys, back to back. Webb's office has an actual door.

BENSON

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.

BENSON
Meat and potatoes, King Shit.
Someone's gotta do it.

FARRAGHER
Hey, Fancy. That story this
morning. That was a big one, son.

WEBB
But not the "Big One".

BENSON
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. Great story.
My editor's pissed we missed it.

WEBB
Good.

RICH KLINE
I studied your stories in J-school.
Can't imagine you have many
friends.
(then)
Any advice?

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

INT. WEBB'S OFFICE - MERC BUREAU - SAME

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's Coral Baca--?
(dialing; into phone)
This is Gary Webb.

CORAL/PHONE
The brilliant reporter finally
calls.

Her accent Latina. Sultry.

CORAL/PHONE (CONT'D)
I'm a fan of your work.

WEBB
You follow my work?

CORAL/PHONE
I do now.

Pause. Strange.

WEBB
What can I do for you?

CORAL/PHONE
It's what I can do for you.

WEBB
What can you do for me, Coral?

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

Webb starts doodling on a legal pad.

CORAL/PHONE (CONT'D)
My boyfriend Raffie's in prison for
cocaine trafficking. That's Rafael
Cor-ne-jo.

WEBB
Colombian?

CORAL/PHONE
Nicaraguan.

Absentmindedly scrawling "Cornejo" on the pad. Circling it, 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. My fifty-thousand-dollar Persian rug. Now someone else lives there, fucks on my sheets, craps in my toilet. I mean what kind of a country is this? Good story, no?

WEBB
Yeah. I just did it.

CORAL/PHONE
But Raffie's different. He sold drugs for the government. One of the assholes who ratted him out sold drugs for the government, too. Tons of it.

Webb's pencil freezes.

WEBB
I'm sorry, say that again?

CORAL/PHONE
Sold drugs. For the Feds and whatnot. The guy says he brought four tons of cocaine into the country. Four tons! And he's working for the government.

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

CORAL/PHONE (CONT'D)
You think I'm one of those crazy 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 read that story?

WEBB

No, I haven't.

CORAL/PHONE

I haven't either. I'll make it
easy. I'll come to you. You'll like
me. I promise.

INT. DINER - SACRAMENTO - DAY

Crowded with Civil Servants and doctors on break. Webb enters, searching.

CORAL (O.S.)

You must be Gary.

He turns. How did he pass her? 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.

She sticks out her hand. Holds his a second too long. He sits. She takes him in, reaches right across the table and fingers the end of his hair.

CORAL

Now I know why people hate you.

Gary does not look at her tits.

WEBB

How about those documents?

Coral brings documents out of a briefcase. PUSH IN on OFFICIAL DEA and FBI REPORTS, all stamped "CONFIDENTIAL - PROPERTY OF US GOVT - MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED".

WEBB (CONT'D)

(pleasantly surprised)
Nice going, Coral!

CORAL
(one off the top)
This is the thing you really need
to see.

WEBB
(scanning; then)
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 as a reporter I've
maybe seen one. How'd you get it?

CORAL
The government turned it over on
discovery by mistake. L.J. O'Neale.

WEBB
The Fed's California drug czar?

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 in the dark. 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.

She pulls around to his side, leans against him, reaching into the pile of papers. Breasts flowing. Shoulders touching.

CORAL

(points)

There. 'Danilo Blandon'. That's the one I was telling you about, who sells drugs for the government.

(Webb reading)

He said he was a friend. He played with my kid. Then he rats on Raffie. Weirds me out.

WEBB

(reading on)

On government payroll. And selling dope. And ... wow ... selling a lot of it.

She points again: "*Norwin Meneses*".

CORAL

That's Blandon's boss. Norwin Meneses. Raffie says he's probably the biggest trafficker in the whole country.

WEBB

They couldn't be that stupid.

CORAL

Oh but they are.

Like the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

WEBB

What other documents have you got?

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's not gonna look--

He looks. His eyes lift. Settle into hers. Fuck. He smiles.

CORAL (CONT'D)
Okay, Gary Webb. Raffie's got court tomorrow. You need to come.

EXT. FEDERAL COURT HOUSE - SAN FRANCISCO - NEXT DAY

Webb hurries along, goes inside as we--

INT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Webb heads down a corridor, looks around, sees a door marked "Criminal Division" and heads toward it.

Two PROSECUTORS are clearly angry about something, talking and gesticulating to each other. Behind them, business is booming. An army of FEDERAL PROSECUTORS faces off an array of expensive ATTORNEYS and long-haired CLIENTS in fancy suits.

Webb crosses to Coral. She looks business-like in a black little number suited for funerals and trials.

CORAL
There's Raffie. I told him about you.

Cornejo - handsome Latino with long hair - glares at them.

WEBB
He looks friendly.

CORAL
He doesn't like seeing me with other men.

Webb clocks a large blond MAN, 40, among the Prosecutors.

CORAL (CONT'D)
That's that little bitch O'Neale.

O'Neale walks out of the court room and down the hall.

WEBB
Be right back.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - FEDERAL COURT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Webb steps up into the urinal next to O'Neale's.

WEBB
Gary Webb, San Jose Mercury-News.

O'NEALE
So?

O'Neale shakes, re-zips, steps to the sinks. Webb does same.

O'NEALE (CONT'D)
Why would local news be interested
in this case?

WEBB
I'm not.

O'NEALE
Good. Then I'm not here.

WEBB
But I am interested in Danilo
Blandon.

O'NEALE
Never heard of him.

WEBB
Then why's he on your witness list?

O'NEALE
Is he?

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

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

O'Neale quickly exits.

EXT. CITY PARK - SACRAMENTO - DAY

Across from the court house. Webb approaches Coral on a park bench. Slides next to her.

But we're seeing all this through a LONG POV/SURVEILLANCE SHOT. They're being watched.

She hands him a file, and--

INT. CALIFORNIA STATE ARCHIVES - DAY

Webb at a long table, surrounded by stacks of documents. Furiously reading.

ANOTHER SHOT - WEBB feeding the Xerox machine with rolls of dimes. Copying everything he can.

Laying out grainy photos of two men, writing in sharpie under the faces: "*Danilo Blandon*" ... "*Norwin Meneses*".

INT. COURTHOUSE GARAGE - SAN FRANCISCO - LATE THAT AFTERNOON

Webb walks to his car with two shopping bags full of documents. Gets in. As he reaches for the ignition--

A hard knock on the passenger side glass. O'Neale. Standing there. Webb reaches and opens the door. O'Neale gets in. Sour look on his face. Really doesn't want to be here.

O'NEALE

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

WEBB

Is that what you wanted to talk about?

O'NEALE

No.

(then)

So how does this work? For real. Is she fucking you? You think she wouldn't fuck *me* if I let that scumbag boyfriend of hers go?

WEBB

That's not how this works.

O'NEALE

Because I know about Cleveland.

(Webb looks at him)

We know all about that.

WEBB

(defiant; in his element)

Okay. Let's play.

(then)

You have Danilo Bandon cold on massive - almost unprecedented - amounts of blow, warehouses full. You make him Public Enemy Number One, and sentence him to eternity. Then you just let him walk. Then, even weirder, you move to block all references to government operations in federal cocaine cases. *Bandon's* trafficking cases. I mean, that's just nuts. What did he give you? It must've been huge.

O'NEALE

I hate you fucking people.

WEBB

(realizing)

Or are you afraid of him?

Long beat.

O'NEALE

You believe in redemption, Webb?

WEBB

Only when I have to.

O'NEALE

What will it take to keep Bandon 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.

O'NEALE

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

O'Neale totally sadly sincere.

WEBB

Always tell the truth?

O'NEALE

Where did you grow up?

WEBB

Indiana.

O'NEALE

On a farm?

(Webb nods)

With animals?

(Webb nods)

Fuck. Is that really true?

WEBB

Everything except the animals.

O'NEALE

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

(beat)

Even in Cleveland.

WEBB

We're done.

O'NEALE

Good. Get the fuck out.

WEBB

It's my car.

O'Neale gets out.

O'NEALE

Stay away from this.

WEBB

I'm not going away. I'm a reality.
Blandon's a reality.

O'NEALE
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.

INT. WEBB'S MERCURY-NEWS OFFICE - DAY

Dawn's sitting on Webb's desk. The Blandon grand jury transcript in her hands.

DAWN
(nonplussed)
So what's the story? A paranoid
Justice official off his meds? Feds
use bad guys to catch bad guys?
Sounds like low-hanging fruit.

WEBB
All I know is I've never seen a
suit like that, in that kind of
power position, so freakin nervous.

Farragher bangs in with pizza.

DAWN
We're talking here.

Farragher bows ... "Sorry, chief" ... closes the door. Dawn tosses the transcript on the desk.

WEBB
The guy was *desperate*.

DAWN
How do you know?

WEBB
He brought up Cleveland.

DAWN
He threatened you?

WEBB
I'm telling you, it drove him off
the rails.

She takes him in. Sizing him up. His a face women love at
their own peril. They HOLD a long look. He can't hold her
stare, eyes slide.

DAWN
We're not the LA Times. But we're
not small-time.

WEBB
Then let me go after this.

DAWN
(okay)
Get Blandon and we'll see if it's
anywhere worth going.

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

Webb's TR 6 pulls into the driveway. He hustles into--

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

And 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 fishsticks.

WEBB
Shit.

ERIC
Who's Coral?

IAN
She's hot.

SUE
She came into my house.

Sue's by the stove. Pissed. Wielding a spatula like a weapon.

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--

WEBB
Hey, c'mere.

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

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. I miss you. We need to
sleep together. Like it always was.

SUE
It'll never be like it was.
Fuckwad.

He pulls her in. She lets him.

WEBB

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

Again. Nothing.

SUE

But you want it to.

WEBB

No.

SUE

I'm supposed to be the window, not the walls, remember?

(he reaches for her)

Don't. Just. Don't. ... Jesus, I can't believe we're doing this again. This is why we moved here! I left my family, my friends, moved out to California, which I fucking hate, all this stupid goddamn sunshine and happy shiny faces. Start over. Blah blah fucking blah. ... It's always everyone else's corruptions and sins, everyone else's crimes.

WEBB

I'm trying.

SUE

You believe that woman?

WEBB

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

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. Why can't
you just be you? What ghost are you
chasing? Why can't you just be
here, be still, be satisfied for
one day?

WEBB

I'm not gonna fuck this up.

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

SUE

Fuck you. She said to tell you
there's another hearing tomorrow.

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - THAT NIGHT

Sue asleep. Alone.

The kids in their beds.

A rectangle of light spills out of Webb's home office. Inside
is Webb, cross-legged on the floor, smoking a joint. The
documents from the box surrounding him.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME - MORNING - WEBB ASLEEP AGAINST THE WALL.

IAN

(toeing him)

School!

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - KITCHEN - MORNING

The Webb kids at the table. Webb, sleepwalking, trying to get
breakfast together. Christine trailing him with a sponge.

Ian and Eric start to throw shit at each other. Napkins,
plastic spoons.

CHRISTINE

Can't you control these animals?

Webb explodes with laughter.

WEBB
(screams up the stairs)
Natives getting restless down here!

Webb plunked by a piece of bread. Fires back at Eric.

CUT TO SUE UPSTAIRS

Listening to the riot from bed, folds a pillow around her face. Even the good is too much.

WEBB (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Ian!

BACK TO DOWNSTAIRS - THE GARAGE

Webb finds Ian standing over the Triumph -- disintegrated into two hundred pieces. A carnage of machine guts.

IAN
When did you do this?

WEBB
Last night.

IAN
Thought we were doing it together.

WEBB
I pulled at a wire to see what gauge we needed and kept going. I can't help myself. Taking things apart. 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)
Now squint--

He does, narrows his eyes. Ian tries.

WEBB (CONT'D)
You see? Electrical stuff over there, fuel stuff there, the hub and ball bearings.
(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

Let it be messy, but it comes together. There's always 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 down 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 looks at Ian. His kid gets it. Drapes his arm over him.

WEBB

At least you knew what was inside. At least there are no secrets.

IAN

I didn't know motorcycles had secrets.

WEBB

Everything's got a secret.

Ian picks up the carburetor. Tosses it onto the other shit.

IAN

I want to ride this bike, dad. I want to ride it next to you.

WEBB

Then put it together. Figure out how things really work.

IAN

Just next time wait for me.

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

Webb enters on Raphael Cornejo's trial. But proceedings have just broken up. O'Neale and his army filing out.

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

CORAL

Very impressive, Gary Webb.

WEBB

What just happened?

CORAL

You must terrify them. They just stuffed Danilo Blandon under a rug. He's off the witness list.

WEBB

Can he do that?

CORAL

Only if he's willing to let Raffie walk.

(Cornejo approaches; a
free man)

One day maybe I can thank you properly.

She starts to leave. Webb watching them go.

WEBB

(livid)

Wait a second--

Webb grabs for her arm. Cornejo in Webb's face.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Did you use me just to spring him?

CORAL

I'm the bimbo, remember?

(leans; whispers)

Be happy, Gary Webb--

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

CORAL (CONT'D)
Blandon's who you really want.

INT. NEWS BUREAU - SACRAMENTO - THAT NIGHT

Lights off. Computers down. Janitors pushing cleaning carts.
Every desk empty. Except in--

INT. WEBB'S OFFICE - MERC BUREAU

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

Fueled by defiance.

Then STOP. Something he's looking at. FBI report.

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

PUSH IN TIGHTER -- last page -- bottom -- a single mention --
*"Cornejo/Blandon distribution outlet was one Ricky Ross
(a.k.a. 'Freeway Ricky Ross')--*

EVEN TIGHTER -- *"Currently charged -- possession --
trafficking -- sales -- crack cocaine -- Watts, Los Angeles."*

INT. ALAN FENSTER'S LAW OFFICE - SANTA MONICA - DAY

Webb sits perspiring in a stifling outer office. Outside the
window, palm trees.

ALAN FENSTER - dapper, 50's - comes out.

FENSTER
Sorry about the air conditioning.
Come on in.

Webb follows to his office. After they sit--

FENSTER (CONT'D)
What can I do for you?

WEBB
You represent Ricky Ross. The crack
dealer.

FENSTER
Alleged dope dealer.

WEBB
(reads from his notebook)
Freeway Ricky Ross. The biggest
dealer in Los Angeles, the
epicenter of the national crack
epidemic.
(looks up)
That's in the LA Times.

FENSTER
Who do you write for again?

WEBB
San Jose Mercury-News.

FENSTER
Never heard of it.

WEBB
That's going to change. How's your
case going?

FENSTER
You're an arrogant one. What do you
actually want?

WEBB
Who's the Justice official on
Ricky's case?

FENSTER
You didn't have to come here for
that. That's public record. L.J.
O'Neale.

WEBB
How about Danilo Blandon? Heard of
him?

FENSTER
Maybe.

WEBB
He is going to testify against your
client.

FENSTER

You have that backwards. Danilo Bandon is a friend and *associate* of my client. He might actually testify *for* Ricky.

WEBB

That'll be hard.

FENSTER

Why?

WEBB

Because he's a paid government informant. He's O'Neale's star witness.

Beat. Then the pretense evaporates. Fenster leans, almost stands.

FENSTER

He's the informant?? Bandon??
Goddammit!

(then; gathers himself)

It all makes sense now. If you only knew the horseshit O'Neale puts me through every time I try to find out who his super-secret weapon is. They block everything, and get away with it, claiming - get this - national security.

(pause; then)

So what do you want?

WEBB

Danilo Bandon.

INT. LA COUNTY JAIL - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Webb and Fenster moving through security. SERIES OF CUTS brings them to 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*? Fuck you.

WEBB
It's in northern California.

ROSS
I'm a businessman. I know where San
Jose is.

FENSTER
Have a conversation, Ricky.

WEBB
What do you know about Danilo
Blandon?

Pause. Then--

ROSS
Dude's my godfather, man. My
partner. Everyone I know in the biz
I know through him.

WEBB
(making sure)
Danilo Blandon moved cocaine into
the United States and sold it to
you.

Ross looks to Fenster. Fenster nods. Ross crosses his arms.
No way.

FENSTER
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) FENSTER
Hey, fuck you, man! Ricky, siddown.

ROSS
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 about this, Danilo
Bandon was working for the
government the whole time.

Ross just looks at Webb.

ROSS
You for real?
(to Fenster)
He for real?
(Webb nods)
Bandon a snitch? And me his bitch?
(impressed; he takes a
minute; doing the mental
telemetry)
They say I sold dope all over, but
man, Bandon *fifty* times heavier
than I'll ever be. He's LA, he's
New York, he's Atlanta. He's
everywhere, man. It's like he
brings that shit in by U.S. Mail. 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.

FENSTER

Allegedly, Ricky.

ROSS

Fuck that. It was *raining* crack cocaine! I gave that spic six million a week!

(pause)

And you're telling me he's working for the *government* the whole time, working me from some beach on San Trope, and they put *my* ass in jail??

FENSTER

Obviously I won't be putting my client on the stand.

ROSS

That's some fucked up shit there.

(then)

You gotta notebook? I'll tell you everything about that motherfucker you wanna know.

WEBB

I want you to show me.

ROSS

I'm a little tied up.

WEBB

Tell me where to go, Ricky.

ROSS

You don't wanna go down there.

WEBB

I want to know what Blandon really did.

EXT. LA COUNTY JAIL - DAY

Webb and Fenster head back into the sunshine. Fenster distracted, looking off.

WEBB

You don't look so good, Fenster.
Did you--?

FENSTER

Have any idea 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.

WEBB

C'mon, I'll buy you lunch.

EXT./INT. WEBB'S CAR - STREET CORNER - WATTS, LA - DAY

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

Across the street, a scene of post-Apocalyptic urban blight: the Nickerson Gardens housing project. Detritus and decay. Dope -- and its desolation -- everywhere. LAPD helicopters overhead ... WHIP PAN to COPS on every corner. To dope deals going down in the alleys ... To GANGBANGERS in hoodies and strung-out CUSTOMERS and GANG SOLDIERS and LOOKOUTS.

CAMERA STOPPING on a CORPSE in the street. Teenage BOY. People so numb to it all they step around it. Could have been there for days. Now--

WHIP PAN back on Webb. Eyes scanning, taking it all in. Upset. Eyes moist. It's all worse than he thought.

FENSTER

Who pissed you off?

WEBB

(focused; thinking)
What are you going to do when you
get Blandon on the stand?

FENSTER
(suddenly overwhelmed by
what's outside the
windows)
Not a clue.

Pause. Then--

WEBB
Maybe we can help each other out. I
need Blandon to talk to me, but I
can't make him. But you can.

Pause. Fenster gets where Webb is going.

FENSTER
Is that even legal?

WEBB
Is it *illegal*?

FENSTER
Is it *ethical*?

WEBB
No idea. Who cares?

FENSTER
Glad you're not a lawyer. You're
dangerous.

INT. FEDERAL COURT ROOM - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Ross and Fenster at the defendant's table. Webb behind them.

The doors punch open. L.J. O'Neale struts in carrying a box-load of records, followed by a platoon of DEA AGENTS carrying more boxes.

JUDGE enters.

JUDGE
Come to order--

FENSTER
Defense calls Danilo Blandon for
redirect, your honor.

DANILO BLANDON enters with his entourage of U.S. Marshals.
Fancy suit. Aviator glasses.

O'NEALE
Approach, your honor?

JUDGE
Later.

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

Fenster rises. (Throughout, Fenster reads off a yellow legal pad. The kind of yellow legal pad we've seen Webb use. The handwriting on the pad is Webb's. The doodles are Webb's)

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 and tons of cocaine into the United States?

O'Neale jumps to his feet.

O'NEALE
Objection! Relevance! Inflammatory!

FENSTER
The government called this witness, your honor, not me. He is a paid confidential informant. The jury has a right to know the scope of his so-called expertise.

JUDGE
Agreed.

O'Neale sits, glaring at Webb.

FENSTER
Mr. Blandon?

Webb leans forward.

BLANDON
(simply)
Yes.

FENSTER

Yes what?

BLANDON

The government knew.

FENSTER

Everything?

BLANDON

Everything.

The Judge - surprised - throws a curious glance at O'Neale.

WEBB

(sotto; to Fenster)

How much crack did he put on the streets?

FENSTER

(back to Blandon)

Just 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? What?

BLANDON

Three million.

An audible hush falls over the courtroom. O'Neale looks down at his shoes under the table.

FENSTER

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

BLANDON

One and a half billion dollars.

Beat. The hush replaced by a murmur, then open chatter. A couple voices in the gallery cry out in disbelief.

O'Neale 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.

FENSTER

Thank you for that.

O'Neale slowly shaking his head. Webb nods to Fenster. "Okay. Now."

O'NEALE

Wait ... what?

(on his feet)

Counsel is taking direction from this reporter!

JUDGE

Approach!

O'Neale and Fenster approach.

O'NEALE

That man in the first row is a reporter and he's 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

I don't like it, but I can't stop it.

O'NEALE

(near panic)

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

JUDGE
Not a chance.

O'NEALE
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.

O'Neale and Fenster return to their places.

FENSTER
Mr. Blandon, who in the Federal Government were you working with?

BLANDON
You wanna name?

FENSTER
Or a what. FBI--?

Blandon looks to O'Neale for a lifeline.

JUDGE
Mr. O'Neale can't answer that question for you, Mr. Blandon.

BLANDON
Not FBI.

FENSTER
CIA?

Blandon nods.

FENSTER (CONT'D)
(surprise)
CIA? The Central Intelligence Agency?

BLANDON
Yeah.

FENSTER
Not the Drug Enforcement Agency--?

BLANDON
Well, them too.

Webb leans all the way. Almost standing--

WEBB
Holy shit.

FENSTER
You were on the Drug Enforcement Agency's most-wanted list at the time, weren't you?

BLANDON
Yes. Number two.

FENSTER
Do you happen to remember who was number one?

BLANDON
Norwin Meneses.

FENSTER
Who's that?

BLANDON
My partner.

FENSTER
And did Mr. Meneses also meet with the CIA?

BLANDON
We always met them together.

Webb sees O'Neale send another guy running out of the courtroom.

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

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.

FENSTER
What was on those planes?

BLANDON
Food.

FENSTER
Only food?

BLANDON
Uniforms ...
(Fenster waits)
...and guns ... and ammunition ...

WEBB
(loud enough for everyone
to hear)
Anything else?

The court turns to Webb.

FENSTER
Anything else, Mr. Bandon?

BLANDON
Money. Sometimes planes just
carried cash.

Now Fenster's studying the legal pad. Out of questions. Webb
furiously writes a note, waives it. Fenster takes it.

FENSTER
Did the planes come back empty?

JUDGE
Mr. Fenster, at least pretend!

BLANDON
(unsure who he's speaking
to now; so, to Webb)
No.

FENSTER
What was on them?

BLANDON
The planes were loaded with
cocaine.

FENSTER
Where did the planes land?

BLANDON
Here. California. Arizona. Florida.

Beat. The room takes that in.

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
Why else would they come to Norwin and me? They knew who we were.

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

FENSTER
One 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.

BACK TO Webb's bench. It's empty. He's already gone.

INT. MERCURY-NEWS NEWSROOM - SAN JOSE - DAY

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.

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

Webb has downloaded all. A big silent beat. Then--

DAWN

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

WEBB

You told me to get Blandon. I got him.

CEPPOS

It was ballsy, and it worked. I like that in my reporters.

WEBB

What's bugging you? This is the biggest story the Merc's ever had.

DAWN

That's what's bugging me. It's too big, too many blind spots. We don't know Washington. We don't do International.

WEBB

We do now.

CEPPOS

It's a game-changer for us, Dawn.

DAWN

What's the CIA say?

WEBB

They're not calling me back. But they'll deny.

DAWN

I want that in there.

(then)

I just want to make sure we're doing this for the right reasons.

WEBB

What are the *wrong* reasons?

She can't answer. There is no answer.

CEPPOS

This one puts us on the map.

And claps Webb's back like a coach, then leaves them alone.

DAWN

(Ceppos)

A month ago he was the CFO. He's an accountant, not an editor.

WEBB

We're out there by ourselves on this, Dawn.

DAWN

Why is that?

WEBB

Because no one listens. No one's connecting the dots.

DAWN

What makes you think they're going to let you?

WEBB

They?

DAWN

The government. The CIA.

WEBB

Who's asking permission?

She looks at him. A long beat. She gets him. She sees it now.

DAWN

You're a guerilla in a cage. You're so *hungry*. You bang on the bars for more. All the time.

(then)

Does Sue know this about you?

WEBB

Were you ever hungry?

DAWN

I'm an Indian, not a Chief. I'm here to save you from yourself.

(then)

What do you need?

WEBB
I want to go all the way up-river.
Nicaragua.

DAWN
Don't fuck it up.

INT. MANAGUA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - NICARAGUA - DAY

Webb crossing a crowded arrivals hall to customs.

EXT. TIPITAPA PRISON - MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - DAY

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

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY

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.

INT. TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY

Webb is led by the goon down a long corridor.

He 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. Dark-skinned YOUNG INMATE LOVER beside him.

WEBB
Norwin Meneses?

MENESES
(looking up from his book;
his English perfect)
What took you so long?

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME - LATER

MENESES (CONT'D)

It's easy for you 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 hypocritical Party of the People, the tyranny of the left. Collectives in the jungle, virtual slave-camps. The government tells us what we can say, think, 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

Did it have to be drugs?

MENESES

We sell what we have. It could have been bananas and coconuts. But Americans don't want bananas and coconuts. They want cocaine. And I know where to get cocaine. Lots and lots of cocaine--

CUT TO:

THE HOW-THE-DOPE-MOVES SEQUENCE

A WHITE AMERICAN PILOT in the cockpit of a DC-9. (Name's MICHAEL PALMER but we won't need to know it.)

Palmer's plane goes airborne in Michigan, innocent enough ... lands on an airstrip outside Tucson ...

MENESES (OVER) (CONT'D)

They needed me for the same reason you do. I know everything. What it is. How to do it.

Palmer now met by waiting pick-ups 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 ...

MENESES (OVER) (CONT'D)
 People like me are already good at escaping the law. We already know who is corrupt and who is in whose pocket. 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.

The plane takes off ... lands at a JUNGLE AIRSTRIP ... where it's off-loaded into low-slung hangars.

Then re-loaded with boxes.

The boxes are labeled "frozen shrimp".

Except it's the jungle and it's 100-degrees.

WEBB (OVER)
 Who wanted you, specifically?

MENESES (OVER)
 Ollie wanted me. He called me personally.

WEBB (OVER)
 Oliver North--?

INSERT PHOTO: OLIVER NORTH, Meneses, Blandon and one or two other AMERICAN SPOOKS, drinking beer under an awning at the airstrip.

And now, quickly, "The Photo" of North taking "The Oath", squeezed into full dress regalia, that chestful of medals, right palm flat against the air. Crossing his heart to God.

MENESES (OVER)
 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.

And now a fast shuffle of JUMP CUTS:

TO crates off-loaded from a massive cargo ship in Long Beach.

TO the WHITE AMERICAN delivering weapons to camouflaged outfits in the Nicaraguan jungle.

TO scenes of jungle warfare.

MENESES (OVER) (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 ...

TO corpses - women, children - lying akimbo.

TO Palmer's plane landing at a desolate airstrip in Florida.

TO boxes of 'frozen shrimp' off-loaded into Hertz vans.

MENESES (OVER) (CONT'D)
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.

TO trucks being stripped, piping stuffed with bladders of cocaine.

TO the vans and trucks on American interstates.

TO a rock house in Nickerson Gardens, Watts. Powder coke being cooked into rocks by MOTHERS, their KIDS playing around their feet.

TO an 8-year-old BOY selling rocks of crack out of a crack house in Nickerson.

TO Ricky Ross in a separate shit-hole apartment in Nickerson. Feeding bricks of cash to a counting machine.

TO the grenade launcher and Uzi by Ross's side, same shit being sold to the jungle.

TO Blandon opening a used car dealership in the San Fernando Valley ... a restaurant in LA ... Ross opening Freeway Motor Inn.

TO a Miami apartment loaded with American cash floor-to-ceiling.

TO a SWISS BANKER (Hansjörg Bösch) seating Blandon in his Banque Suisse office in Panama City.

TO new military trucks off-loading new M-16s, uniforms, land-mines, in the Nicaraguan jungle.

WEBB (OVER)
North said all that with a straight face?

MENESES (OVER)
No one took him seriously. But they should have.

TO AMERICAN ADVISORS training Contra GUERILLAS in killing.

And finally, absurdly:

TO Nicaraguan frog-men in wet suits swimming sealed bales of cocaine ashore under the Golden Gate Bridge.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY

MENESES
I will introduce you to my banker.
At the moment he's in a better position to help you understand.

INT. BANQUE SUISSE - MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - DAY

Webb walks into an expansive corner office. HANSJORG BOSCH rises to greet him.

BOSCH
Norwin called. What do you want to see?

WEBB
I want to see how it moves.

And we--

EXT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - JUNGLE AIRSTRIP - DAY

Heat and insects and whirlpooling dust. The hangar is half-collapsed, sun-bleached. Five doors marked 1 - 5. The airstrip long, for big planes, mostly overgrown.

BOSCH (OVER)
We have fifty transport depots.
From Colombia to Nicaragua--

Webb stands in front of door #4. Staring. Ominous.
Something's in there. Or was.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - OPA-LOCKA, FLORIDA - DAY - AERIAL SHOT

Webb alone in the middle of another abandoned airstrip. Heat waves like the sky is melting.

BOSCH (OVER)
To your country. To the United
States.

The desolate privacy of the place is numbing, to Webb, and to us. We LINGER here a beat, then--

INT. OPA-LOCKA AIRPORT - DAY

Webb drops his rental and heads through the garage toward the terminal. It's all shadows and echoes.

Until he hears other noises ... other footsteps. And Webb slows. Knows he's not alone, but keeps going, quickening his pace ... nervous.

ANGLE - THREE LATINO GANGBANGERS in hoodies behind him.

Turning his body now, Webb RUNS ... heads for the stairs. Leaps three at a time. To the bottom and--

Stops. Looks up. Into the shadows. Nothing. Silence. Real?

EXT. DULLES AIRPORT - WASHINGTON, DC - MORNING

An American Airlines plane lands.

INT. DULLES AIRPORT - WASHINGTON

Webb disembarks, same clothes, with just the backpack.

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

Lunchtime. Sidewalk roiling with the federal crowd. CAMERA FINDS Webb at a newspaper stand watching the entrance, holding a sheath of papers under his arm.

He spots who he's looking for and falls into step beside a small owlish man, 40ish. Glasses around his neck: JONATHAN WINER.

WINER

Who are you?

WEBB

Gary Webb, San Jose Mercury-News.

WINER

Never heard of it.

WEBB

I know.

WINER

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

WEBB

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

Winer looks at the thing in Webb's hand. He stops.

WINER

Dammit.

WEBB

You want to know all the pages your name appears on?

WINER

This isn't how this works.

WEBB

How does it work?

Winer looks at him. Rumpled clothes. Four-day beard.

WINER

You ever been to Washington before?

WEBB
Fifth grade class trip.

Winer starts to walk away.

WEBB (CONT'D)
I just saw Norwin Meneses.

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

EXT. MALL - WASHINGTON, DC - DAY

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

WINER
Can I eat my lunch at least?

Webb has the papers on his knee. Says nothing.

WINER (CONT'D)
That's classified, you know. How did you get it?

WEBB
A drug dealer gave it to me.

WINER
Perfect.
(disgusted, he throws his lunch away)
Listen, this is a fucking nightmare. You have no idea what you're getting into.

Webb lights a cigarette, takes a drag. Poker.

WINER (CONT'D)
I'm on the National Security Council now. 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.

Winer grabs the papers. Shakes them.

WINER (CONT'D)
See this shit? Everyone who touched this was destroyed.
(MORE)

WINER (CONT'D)

I lost my marriage, my job, my house. My ex convinced the court my kids were in jeopardy just being around me, so I lost them too.

(hands it back)

Put it away.

WEBB

Your name goes nowhere near this. We never spoke. I give you my word.

WINER

What do you want from me?

WEBB

I you to help me connect the dots. Start by telling me about Blandon and Meneses.

WINER

(laughs)

Those shitbirds? They're a waste of time.

(then)

Let me tell you something. The day Ronald Reagan got elected the Cubans and Soviets started triggering revolutions all over South and Central America. In our own back yard. When they got Nicaragua, that put them fifty miles from the Panama Canal. Reagan drew the line in the sand. That backwater was going to be our final engagement with the Evil Empire. That's where America was going to win the Cold War.

(beat)

The thing was, Congress despised Reagan. They refused to fund his little war. So the White House needed money, lots and lots of money.

WEBB

Keep going.

Joggers approach. Winer waits, then:

WINER

That's when Senate investigators, including myself, started hearing things about a particular government agency. Ludicrous impossible things.

WEBB

The CIA.

WINER

That's right. The CIA. How do you know that already?

WEBB

I'll tell you later. Just keep going.

WINER

Well, it turned out it wasn't so ludicrous. I underestimated - badly underestimated - how much the White House wanted that brutal little war in that shithole of a country.

WEBB

(gets up; starts pacing)
You're telling me the US government actually got money from the drugs?

WINER

They shared the profits. Like any other business partner. But not the *government*. No one else knew in the beginning. It was just the Agency.

WEBB

It's stupid to be true.

WINER

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

WEBB

Why don't I already know about this? Why doesn't everyone know about this?

WINER

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--

WINER

(rolling)

And no one - not the New York Times, not CBS news, not the Washington Post - would touch it with a ten-foot pole. It all just went away like it never happened.

(after a long beat)

What paper did you say you worked for?

WEBB

San Jose Mercury-News.

WINER

Ever do anything like this before?

(Webb shakes, No)

Has your paper?

WEBB

Not that I know of.

WINER

This is very fancy information you have in your possession. Very expensive. And very 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. Two were killed in a car bomb. A dozen others from Central America disappeared.

WEBB

You're telling me my life is in danger?

WINER

I'm suggesting you think about whether it's worth it. This story will not change the life of the average American. Maybe it actually makes their lives a little bit shittier.

WEBB

I tell what happens. The outcome's not my problem.

WINER

It should be.
(looks at Webb; seen this all before)
This is your ticket out of small-time. To the New York Times or the Post. You're going to make your bones on this.

WEBB

This is a true story.

WINER

My friend, some stories are just too true to tell.
(then)
Do you have a family, Mr. Webb?

WEBB

You're actually telling me to walk away.

WINER

Knowing what I know now? You'd be an idiot not to.

EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT., SACRAMENTO - MORNING

Webb pulls into the driveway. Sits behind the wheel, lost in thought.

A hard KNOCK on the glass. Webb startles. Ian standing there with the morning paper. Webb rolls down the window.

WEBB
Hiya, pal.

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT., SACRAMENTO - DAY

Sue and the kids with Webb at the kitchen table.

ERIC
Did they have guns?

WEBB
Four guns. Six knives. And num-
chucks.

SUE
Gary.

CHRISTINE
Did you beat them up, daddy?

SUE
Was there really someone in that
garage? Were you really being
followed?

WEBB
(big smile)
Nah.

Christine runs to Webb. Hugs his legs.

CHRISTINE
I won't let them hurt you, daddy.

INT. BEDROOM, WEBB'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Webb with a towel wrapped at his waist, sits at the edge of
the bed. The sheets with an apres-sex chaos about them.

SUE (O.S.)
(from the bathroom)
Want me to heat up some Chinese?

WEBB
I want you to come back in here.

There's a roach in an ashtray on the night stand. Webb lights
it. Taking a drag, as Sue wanders back in.

WEBB (CONT'D)
(the joint)
You want?

She waves it off. Coming around behind him. Kissing his neck.

SUE
I never know what you know or don't
know. What's inside that head. The
shit you carry around--
(emotional)
But I'm still here.

WEBB
I know you are, baby. I am, too.

SUE
No you're not. You're gone. You're
inside this thing.
(then)
Is it too big, Gary?

WEBB
Too late for too big. Someone has
to do it.

SUE
And it has to be you.

WEBB
Have to? Dunno. But it *is* me.

She looks at him.

SUE
I'm proud of you of this part of
you.

And hands him a pillow. He looks at her.

WEBB
We just made love.

SUE
I know what we did. Now go away.

Webb stands, heads downstairs (to "his room"). Phone rings.

WEBB
(picking up)
This is Gary Webb.

VOICE/PHONE

You're in danger. Your family is in danger.

The voice officious, without emotion or inflection. Sue wanders in, brushing her teeth. Who is it?

Webb turns his back.

WEBB

(into phone)

Uh huh.

VOICE/PHONE

One day when you won't expect it, tomorrow, next month, next year, your brakes are gonna fail. Or your wife's brakes are gonna fail. And that's gonna be it. It'll be something normal. And no one will know. It will not be spectacular.

Line goes dead.

WEBB

(into the dead phone)

Thanks for calling.

SUE (O.S.)

(from the bathroom)

Who was that?

WEBB

Office.

Phone rings again.

WEBB (CONT'D)

(snatching it; into phone)

Listen motherfucker!

Pause. Sue sticks her head out of the bathroom, alarmed now.

O'NEALE/PHONE

It's L.J. O'Neale. Everything okay there, Webb?

WEBB

(gathering himself)

Hello, L.J. O'Neale.

O'NEALE/PHONE

I don't think we've handled this right. Let's back up and have a real conversation. There are some people who want to talk to you. Before you print anything there are some things you need to know.

Webb lights a cigarette, hands shaking.

O'NEALE/PHONE (CONT'D)

Someone will contact you tomorrow with a time and place.

O'Neale hangs up.

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN.

SNAP. Light comes on. We're in Webb's bedroom. Sue alone. She hears something, sits up. Alarm clock reads 3 a.m. Heads downstairs.

SUE

Gary?

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

SUE (CONT'D)

You hear that?

ANGLE - A TREE. Scraping the window. Nothing.

Webb crosses to the window. We're in his POV: there's a car parked incongruously in the middle of the block.

Webb crosses to a closet. Pulls down a shoe-box from a shelf.

SUE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Gary?

Pulls out an old .38 pistol wrapped in chamois, a box of bullets. WE LINGER on the gun as he loads the chambers. (We know this gun, from the opening.)

WEBB

Be right there.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Webb's TR-6 pulls up to a modest office building squirreled away in an industrial complex. Shabby anonymity.

O'Neale is waiting at the door.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Webb enters with O'Neale. The room has no signage or information; seems rented. Four FEDERAL AGENTS are seated around a table. Two we recognize from court:

O'NEALE
(introducing them)
Agents Chretien and Jones.

The other two are not introduced.

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

WEBB
I'm okay.

CHRETIEN
Get him a cup of coffee.

O'Neale goes out.

CHRETIEN (CONT'D)
(good cop)
So okay. We have a conundrum. We
fucked up.

JONES
We didn't fuck up--

Chretien looks at him. Shut up.

CHRETIEN
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.
(MORE)

CHRETIEN (CONT'D)

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. Lives on the line.

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

WEBB

How do you know that?

CHRETIEN

How do we know what?

WEBB

What I'm getting close to? What I know? What I don't know?

CHRETIEN

Well, we know about Nicaragua. We know you saw Meneses.

But obviously so much more--

WEBB

Am I being followed?

(silence)

Are you tapping my phones? Are there any laws you guys believe in?

JONES

(bad cop)

What's your angle? That your government uses scumbags to catch bigger scumbags?

WEBB

I was under the impression *you* had something you wanted to say to *me*. But since you asked, No, that's not my angle. My angle is that the American government put a huge amount of dope on its streets to fund an illegal war.

The agents look at each other.

CHRETIEN

We're not the bad guys, Gary. Meneses is a bad guy.

(MORE)

CHRETIEN (CONT'D)

Ricky Ross is a bad guy. Those are bad guys. The men in this room -- we're the good guys.

JONES

What you want to say happened never happened.

WEBB

Then why am I here?

He points to the two silent Agents.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Why are *they* here?

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?

CHRETIEN

Why not just let the past stay in the past?

WEBB

Because then when do you get to the part when you learn? When do you figure out a few more ways how avoid screwing things up?

Pause. Chretien smiles, as at a precocious child.

CHRETIEN

It's a delicate system of checks and balances, and we are as necessary to the health of that system as you are. Tax payers were going foot the bill for the consequences of failure. American kids were going to pay. They were going to die.

JONES

--don't know if you've got kids or not. Maybe you don't have any skin in the game--

WEBB

Don't lay that on me. And American kids did die. They're still dying. Just not the ones you care about.

UNIDENTIFIED AGENT

(menacing)

We'd never threaten your children, Mr. Webb.

STOP. Long beat.

WEBB

I didn't say you would.
(starts to breathe quickly)
This was a mistake.

He gets up.

CHRETIEN

What if we get you someone higher up the food chain? 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.

WEBB (CONT'D)

What's that?

SILENT AGENT

Open it.

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

CHRETIEN

(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.

Webb leaves.

INT. WEBB'S MERCURY-NEWS OFFICE

Webb packing a satchel with notebooks, tape recorder. About to split when--

KLINE

Knock-knock.

(Webb looks up at the kid)

Remember me? 'Don't let the
assholes win'?

WEBB

Yeah. Nice to see you.

KLINE

Well, that's probably bullshit. But
look, this is weird, but I'm here
as a reporter, not an admirer.

WEBB

No comment.

Uneasy laugh.

KLINE

I was assigned a story on Ricky
Ross.

WEBB

(deadpan)

Who's Ricky Ross?

KLINE

And my editors can't figure out the
Merc's interest in our dope story.

WEBB

I didn't know newspapers owned
stories. Is that what they're
teaching you in J-school these
days?

KLINE

They told me I had to ask you.

WEBB

(takes pity on him)

I like to fish. That's it. Just
like you. I'm just out there
baiting hooks.

KLINE

I heard it was motorcycles.

After a beat.

WEBB

Why am I interested? Because everything interests me. Okay?

KLINE

No hard feelings.

Kline goes, and--

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

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

We're running out of runway. They're smelling the story out there. Just think of this operation like an act of unbridled criminal stupidity cloaked in a blanket of national security.

DAWN

Meaning it's not just a CIA story.

WEBB

No way. 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 an idea 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.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

A mistake lit with a whole lot of
ends justifying the means, topped
off by a little bit of shit
happens.

DAWN

And *bam!* nuclear fission.

WEBB

The story of what government is.
And what it shouldn't be.

Beat. They all take that in. Then--

WEBB (CONT'D)

We're running out of time.

YARNOLD

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

DAWN

It's locked down.

YARNOLD

Then we're in. A hundred percent.

CEPPOS

Let's bring it in for a landing.

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

A Merc delivery van parked back to the garage. Webb and two
TEAMSTERS unloading boxes of files and stacks of documents.

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT., SACRAMENTO - DAY

We're over little Christine's shoulder. She's on the move, in
the kitchen.

SUE

Bring this to daddy.

Hands the toddler a tray with iced tea. Following her through
the house, she's splashing it around the halls ... past the
open garage door, where Ian is reassembling the Triumph's
carburetor. Alone. Into--

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - SAME

Webb's staring trance-like at the wall, where he's tacked up a jungle of 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.

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Webb's asleep on the couch. A sound. He turns.

ANGLE - CHRISTINE

Stands in the doorway in her pj's.

WEBB

Hey, baby.

CHRISTINE

Who's that outside, Daddy?

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

WEBB

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

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

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

INT. BEDROOM, WEBB'S HOUSE - SAME

Meanwhile, Christine sits up, scared ... "Mommy?" ... Sue dead asleep. Christine slips out of bed.

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

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.

CHRISTINE

DADDY!

The intruder BOLTS. We SEE he's white, groomed. Webb FIRES
into the dark. A SCREAM ... the intruder grabs his ass and
goes down. Webb scoops up Christine, and--

CUT TO:

SAME - LATER

The neighborhood lit up like a Christmas tree. A dozen cops
in uniform. EMS works the intruder on the ground. Two COPS
and a DETECTIVE have Webb against the car.

WEBB

The guy was messing with my car.

DETECTIVE

So you try to kill him.

WEBB

I was defending my family.

COP 1

By shooting a guy in the back in
full retreat.

WEBB

Maybe he wasn't just trying to
boost it. Maybe he was doing
something else.

DETECTIVE

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

COP 2

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 here

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

Any family history of paranoia?

ANGLE - INTRUDER

Is loaded into the ambulance. He and Webb look at each other.
A glimmer of something. The joke's on Webb.

WEBB

(rushing the gurney)
Hey I wanna talk to you!

NOW BAM! Webb's face down in the grass, one of the Cops
kneeling on his back. Webb's eating dirt--

SUE (O.S.)

(from inside the house)
Gary!!

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

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?

The Suits look up, bemused.

SUE

They have no right to be in here.

SUIT

It's a crime scene.

The cops aren't helping or interfering or saying a thing.

WEBB

Who the hell are you?

The Suit keeps fingering through the files. Sue SHOVES at him hard. It hardly registers. Webb GRABS the Suit and runs him out of the house.

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

Now Ian is pushing through the scrum. Webb positions his son in front of his desk, puts his hockey stick in his hands.

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

Webb runs into Dawn, who's just arrived. Chaos.

DAWN
Gary, what's going on--?

SUE
What's she doing here?

WEBB
Hang on a second--
(Sue heading upstairs)
Where are you going?

SUE
Our children, Gary. Remember them?

Dawn looks to Gary. Sue looks at Dawn. Unhappy she's here. HOLD a long awkward beat, this triangle. Then Sue heads up.

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

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

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

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

IAN
(grabbing him)
Let it go.

DAWN
Gary look at me!
(she gets Webb to focus)
All this means is you were right.
We've kicked the hornet's nest. Are
you with me here?

Webb locks back in. She has his attention.

DAWN (CONT'D)
Are you still okay? Can you keep
going?
(Webb nods)
Then keep going.

Webb nods--

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

Almost dawn. Webb walks in the door.

WIDE - LIVING ROOM

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

SUE
You knew this could happen.

IAN
There really was someone following
you in Florida?

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

WEBB
He's becoming a man. I'm proud of
him.

SUE
Is it worth it?

WEBB

It's too late for is it worth it.
That's not the right question any
more. This is my job. This is what
I am.

Sue crosses to him. Sits. Her hand floats toward his face.

SUE

Your first job is not the world's
bullshit. It's our bullshit.

Webb tightens his grip on his kid.

WEBB

(Ian)

This is the bullshit that matters.

SUE

But I know what you are.

(then)

Just get it over with.

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Webb unearths 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.

Follow this through a barrage of overlapping JUMP CUTS,
superimposed faces (Blandon, Meneses)...and planes and
hangars and boxes and bricks of dope, bricks of cash.

The cigarettes pile up and the windows go dark with night and
light with morning and dark again...

Sue in the doorway watching. Then she's not. Then she is. Now
in her clothes. Then Ian's there. Forlorn. Because--

IN THE GARAGE

The motorcycle, that piece of shit Triumph, is taking shape.
First the frame ... then the engine. Ian good at this. But
alone at this.

All under the flutter of keyboard clacking... as:

Sue, Ian, Christine and Eric whirl around in their own blur
of routine. School, meals, sleep, school, meals...Webb
nowhere.

As the keyboard clacking comes in gusts now.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BEACH - OUTER BANKS, NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

Webb asleep on a towel, alone in the big sand. The kids want to go to him. Sue holds them back. Let him sleep.

Then all of them frolicking in the waves.

Then Webb and Sue slipping away alone, drop their clothes. Fuck in the sand.

INT. HOUSE - OUTER BANKS - LATE NIGHT

Webb and Sue among youngish families like theirs. A reunion of some sort. Reefer and beer. Progeny asleep on couches.

VOICE (O.S.)
(faint)
Jesus, look at this.

CAMERA FINDS a den. A MAN about Webb's age at a computer. PUSH IN over his shoulder, to the screen, where we see a graphic of a man smoking a crack pipe superimposed over the seal of the CIA.

The Mercury News website. Now Webb's story:

"DARK ALLIANCE

BY GARY WEBB

Mercury News Staff Writer

FOR THE BETTER PART of a decade, a west coast drug ring sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs of Los Angeles and funneled millions in drug profits to a Latin American guerrilla army run by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, a Mercury News investigation has found..."

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Gary? ... Where's Gary?

EXT. CIA HQ - LANGLEY, VIRGINIA - NIGHT

A raincoated Man enters the deserted building. We SEE he carries a few copies of the Merc.

INT. HOUSE - OUTER BANKS, NORTH CAROLINA - NIGHT

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

EXT. HOUSE - OUTER BANKS - SAME

Webb's sitting on the porch. Alone. Beer in hand. Rocking slowly. The sea air on his face. Staring into the dark.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME - LATER

Webb asleep in the rocker. Sue and Ian approach.

SUE
You did it, baby.

The sky just beginning to brighten, we HEAR in PRE-LAP:

CEPPOS/PHONE (PRE-LAP)
(excited)
Gary, Jerry Ceppos. I'm sitting here with Dawn. You should see our switchboard. Every line pinned.

DAWN/PHONE (PRE-LAP)
We're getting calls from all over the world.

INT. HOUSE - OUTER BANKS - MORNING

Webb on the kitchen phone. In his underwear. Badly hung over.

DAWN/PHONE
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.

INT. NEWSROOM - L.A. TIMES - DAY

Rich Kline enters, takes off his coat, sets down his bag. Then spots something waiting for him on his desk.

A COPY OF THE MERC. Kline sits. And starts to read.

KLINE

Fuck.

(he reaches for his head;
knocks over his coffee)

Fuck fuck fuck.

INT. CIA HEADQUARTERS - LANGLEY, VA. - DAY

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

After a long beat the door opens, held by MARC MANSFIELD, Director of public affairs. Mid-30's. Over his shoulder, DEUTCH - 58, reed thin - surrounded by an array of OFFICIALS in crisis management.

A coffee cart enters. We follow it in. The officials pass us on their way out. Mansfield and Deutch alone.

DEUTCH

What's our first move?

MANSFIELD

Walter Pincus at the Washington Post.

DEUTCH

You want me to make the call?

MANSFIELD
It'll signal panic. Let me do it.
Keep your fingerprints clean.

INT. NEWSROOM - WASHINGTON POST - WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Glass wall lets out onto the Post's massive newsroom.

Behind it sits WALTER PINCUS, 64, short and squat, a nimbus of white hair. Surrounded by photos of him with the great politicians of the last 30 years.

A copy of the Mercury-News is on his desk.

Pincus picks up a ringing phone.

MANSFIELD/PHONE (OVER)
Walter, Marc Mansfield.

INTERCUT PINCUS AND MANSFIELD.

MANSFIELD
You usually sound happier to hear from me.

PINCUS
Not today.

MANSFIELD
Walter, who the hell's Gary Webb?

PINCUS
You tell me. A nobody, as far as I can tell, a hayseed, no connection to DC. And 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 early.

MANSFIELD
So it's safe to say we have a common interest in this one.
(silence)
What if I told you there's more to say on this, a whole other point of view. Would the Post work with us?

PINCUS

The Washington Post has always been open-minded about the Agency.

MANSFIELD

What is that, Walter, a yes or a no?

PINCUS

Give me five minutes. I'll call you back.

INT. MANSFIELD'S OFFICE - CIA HQ - CONTINUOUS

Mansfield 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.

Her phone rings.

SECRETARY

Marc Mansfield's office.
(listens; to Mansfield)
Walter Pincus.

Mansfield takes her phone from her.

MANSFIELD

Walter--

PINCUS

Editorial's listening. So is page one. We feel the Agency's point of view isn't being communicated. We're also as interested as you are who the hell Gary Webb is. We don't think this is going to hold up.

MANSFIELD

(covers phone; to his secretary)
Get L.J. O'Neale out here from San Francisco asap.
(to Pincus)
Why don't you think it's going to hold up?

PINCUS

Are you telling me it will?

MANSFIELD

You only get the right answers when
you ask the right questions, right?

(then)

I'm going to have someone call you.

DOJ's point man on this in

California. Name is O'Neale.

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

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.

SOMEONE ELSE

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 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

(barely audible)

I'm sorry, Leo.

WOLINSKY

Didn't we cover Ricky Ross?

(Kline nods)

I seem to remember you checking
into it.

KLINE

Parts of it.

WOLINSKY

Well, apparently the wrong fucking 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

I think it's thin.

EDITOR

Reads like a fairy tell.

WOLINSKY

Well this fairy tale is going to win this guy a Pulitzer. We're going to 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?

CUT TO:

DAN RATHER, PIXILATED, FILLING OUR SCREEN

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--

INT. CEPPOS' OFFICE - MERC NEWSROOM - DAY

Ceppos, Yarnold and Garcia kicked back in chairs, as if at a
ball game. 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
(title: "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.

BACK TO

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 is 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 Blandon and Norwin Meneses
came into our neighborhoods with
the drugs.
(MORE)

MAXINE WATERS (CONT'D)

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.

WIDEN TO ROOM

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 Journalist of the Year.

Long silence. Too happy to speak. Webb gets up, heads for the door. Ceppos drops an envelope on the table.

CEPPOS (CONT'D)

A little token of our appreciation. Take Sue and get outta town for a few days, on us.

INT. ROOM, POST RANCH INN - BIG SUR - MAGIC HOUR

Out the window, the Pacific is on fire. Above it, the universe.

Webb and Sue put down their bags. Webb picks at the card on the bottle: "Congratulations -- your family at the Merc".

They sit on the bed. It's awkward between them.

WEBB

Maybe it's time to get a new house.

SUE

I don't want a new house.

WEBB

We're on top of each other.

SUE

I like being on top of each other.

Pause.

WEBB

We almost didn't get here. I almost ruined everything.

SUE

What is it, Gary?

WEBB

I miss the kids.
(and)
I'm a pain in the ass.

SUE

Yes you are.

WEBB

I'm sorry.

SUE

No you're not, but thank you.
You're worth it.

WEBB

I am?
(she smiles)
I was right. About this.

SUE

Yes you were.

Long beat. She looks at him. She knows him better than that.

SUE (CONT'D)

Gary.
(he looks up)
What is it?

WEBB

Something's wrong.

CUT TO SAME - NEXT MORNING

Webb wakes up. Sue sits in the window, framed by the ocean.
She has the Mercury-News in her hands. Webb props himself up.

SUE

I've read this a couple times now.
It's good, Gary. It's really good.
It's solid. You're fine.

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

Webb sitting across from CHRIS MATTHEWS in the half-dark. 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

Who said anything about American
CIA agents?

CHRIS MATTHEWS

Um, didn't you?

WEBB

The CIA uses cut-outs. Foreign
nationals. That keeps American
fingerprints off covert operations.
So if anything goes sideways--
(mock surrender)
--the CIA can say, What? Who? Me?
We don't know those guys.

(then)

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

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

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

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)

GodDAMMIT! Who told me this guy was
full of shit?!

INT. SOUND STAGE - NBC NEWS - DATELINE SET - DAY

Webb unhooking his mic. Rising from an interview.

HOT FEMALE DATELINE PRODUCER

Great interview, Gary. And
newswoman to newsman, world class
story. Heads will roll.

(Webb smiles)

Thirsty? Ready for a celebratory
drink?

Webb looks at her. This is an effort.

WEBB

I better take a rain check.

INT. BANQUE SUISSE - MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - DAY

The banker Webb interviewed, Hansjorg Bosch, crosses to his door, lets in a short MAN in a sportscoat. Notebook in hand.

FARAH
(shakes)
Doug Farah, Washington Post.

BOSCH
Yes, come in.
(they sit)
You're here about Mr. Webb. His
articles were very provocative.

FARAH
According to Webb, you were the
banker to the Contras. You helped
manage their cash problem.

BOSCH
And?

FARAH
I just want to know if they're
true.

EXT. TWO-LANE ROAD - CALIFORNIA COAST - DAY - LONG SHOT

Webb on his bike gliding like a bird through the rolling
hills west of Sacramento, god's country, to the glittery
Pacific.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - DAY

Farah weaves through crowds to the booth. He enters. Dials.

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

Pincus picks up the phone.

PINCUS
(into phone; gruff)
Okay, put him on.
(puts phone on speaker)
Jackson Diehle's here with me.

ANGLE - JACKSON DIEHLE

sitting across. 50, Foreign Desk Editor.

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

FARAH

I tracked his breadcrumbs on this end. It's checking out, Walter. I found the banker. 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.

Pincus and Diehle exchange worried glances.

PINCUS

Where'd in the north did it come from?

FARAH

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

JACKSON DIEHLE

Are these sources reliable enough - for the Post, I mean?

FARAH

Aside from the banker? Two of them were bag men for Oliver North. There's 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.

Pincus and Diehle just look at each other.

PINCUS

Not sure I'm buying it.

FARAH

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

PINCUS

I'm not running that in our paper.
I have better information that says
otherwise.

FARAH

Well, I'd like to see it. You gonna
cut my copy?

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?

PINCUS

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.

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

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

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

But that's not what he said, asshole!

TV CUTS TO FOOTAGE OF CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY BY JON WINER

WINER

(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.

BACK TO KOPPEL

TED KOPPEL

In other news...

SUE

Wait ... where's the rest?

(stands)

Where the hell's the rest!?

She shuts off the TV.

WEBB

Something's wrong. Something's coming.

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Webb sits staring into the aquarium. The fish are circling. Rest of the house asleep. Picks up the phone and 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?

KLINE/PHONE

I can't. I'm sorry. Good luck.

Kline hangs up.

INT. JERRY CEPPOS'S HOME - NIGHT

Ceppos is playing chess with his SON, who's home from college. Phone rings.

CEPPOS

(picks up)

Hello?

JACKSON DIEHLE/PHONE

Jerry, it's Jackson, with the Washington Post. Jackson Diehle. We met once at the Pulitzer dinner a few years ago.

CEPPOS

Jackson, nice to hear from you.

JACKSON DIEHLE/PHONE

That was a helluva story you ran. A couple things aren't adding up for us, though. You have a few minutes to chat?

CUT TO:

A DARK ROOM

A phone starts to ring.

EXT. BANQUE SWISSE - PANAMA CITY, PANAMA - DAY

UNDER the phone, which continues to RING:

Bosch crossing a crowded sidewalk to his car and DRIVER, is intercepted by TWO MEN IN WINDBREAKERS. They take his elbows and forcefully and without fuss guide him in another direction.

ANGLE - BOSCH'S DRIVER

Craning his neck to watch.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY

Still UNDER ringing phone:

A helicopter cruises steady at 4,000 feet. A side door opens. Pause. Then Bosch is hog-thrown into the open air, arms and legs swimming, plunging and somersaulting--

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

Still dark. Clock reads 4 a.m. Webb props himself up.

The phone.

Webb stares at it. A beat. The phone keeps ringing. Finally Webb picks up.

WEBB
(into phone)
Hello?

WINER/PHONE
Gary, it's Jonathan Winer.

INTERCUT WINER IN HIS GEORGETOWN HOUSE

Winer 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.

WEBB
It's good to hear from you.

WINER
Man, you got far.
(realizing; grim)
(MORE)

WINER (CONT'D)

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.

WINER

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.

WINER

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. They change the secret handshake and don't tell you ... You cease to exist.

Out the window, the sky beginning to brighten.

WINER (CONT'D)

My father - who was an Air Force pilot - once told me 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.

WINER (CONT'D)
Gary? You there?

WEBB
Yes.

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

WEBB
Thank you.
(before he goes)
Hey, Jonathan? What are my options?

WINER
Options?
(then)
You hang in there, Gary.

Winer hangs up. Webb stares at his phone, as at a land mine
he just stepped on.

INT. MERCURY NEWS NEWSROOM, SAN JOSE - DAY

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
(sober)
Before we weigh in, Gary, we wanted
to hear your thoughts.

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, and we're here to attest to the moral purity of the Central Intelligence Agency, and we're not gonna tell you why.

KRIM

Gary. Walter Pincus is a two-time Pulitzer winner.

WEBB

Who thinks his job is to defend the CIA.

CEPPOS

Okay, 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 are vaguely hostile.

WEBB (CONT'D)

What am I missing here?

DAWN

(voice of reason)
The story scares people. It's medicine. It's the kind of story people don't want to hear.

WEBB

Funny, that's just what my wife said. Then she read the story.
(then)
All this means is we need to keep moving, keep digging.

Beat. They're all just looking at him.

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.

As a REPORTER enters, hands Dawn a note.

OUTSIDE COUNSEL (CONT'D)

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

And there it is. They start to break up. Dawn looks up from the note:

WEBB

What is it?

DAWN

Dateline just cancelled their segment on the story.

INT. DAWN GARCIA'S OFFICE - MERC - CONTINUOUS

Webb follows Dawn in. She closes the door.

DAWN

The Post is going to say that you are an active part of Ricky Ross's defense, and that your involvement verged on complicity.

WEBB

(starts to laugh)

With Ricky Ross?

DAWN

Don't you get it? Now you're connected to a crack dealer.

Webb looks at her. Sees it now. She's terrified.

WEBB

C'mon, Dawn. Where're your balls?

DAWN

We're fighting for our lives here, Gary! Your word is all you got. It's all we got.

WEBB
We drew blood. They'd say anything.

DAWN
Would you?

Big silence. Both stunned.

DAWN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

WEBB
(deeply wounded)
Yes you did. What's happening,
Dawn? What's really happening?

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

Webb enters. Looks shell-shocked.

Sue's feeding the kids in the kitchen. Webb joins them, the bag on his lap.

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.

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

IAN
Like what?

WEBB

That none of it's true. That part I didn't expect.

EXT. SUBURB OUTSIDE CLEVELAND - DAY

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, looks off.

THE MAN

My wife did.

REPORTER

Well I'm a reporter from New York, and I was wondering if I could ask a couple questions. Is your wife home?

THE MAN

She's dead.

REPORTER

Oh, I'm--

THE MAN

She committed suicide. But Webb knows more about that than I do. Ask him.

And he slams the door.

EXT. LIESEL CT, SACRAMENTO - WEBB'S BLOCK - DAY

The same REPORTER in Webb's neighborhood. We recognize the neighbor from the night of the shooting.

REPORTER

You mind showing me exactly where all this took place?
(as they cross the lawn)
(MORE)

REPORTER (CONT'D)
So Webb shoots the guy here, the
guy goes down over there--

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

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 airtight.

DAWN
It's not the story now, Gary. 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
Not a good idea.

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

SUE
(firm)
Ian, go upstairs.

When the boy leaves:

WEBB

We're not a PR firm. If a reporter's not pissing people off he's not doing his job. Call the Plain Dealer--

DAWN

We did.

WEBB

(a little hurt at first)
And?

Webb looks at her. Knows--

SUE

They found out about the girl.

Dawn nods. Webb looks confused.

DAWN

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

Webb sits back, exhales.

DAWN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, this really isn't my business.

(to Webb)

We heard there were personal issues. But we didn't know there was a suicide. Did she write a note?

(Sue nods)

What did it say?

SUE

She couldn't live without him.

Dawn gets up, goes to the window. Eyes moist.

SUE (CONT'D)

(she needs to know)

What part are you upset about?

Dawn reigns herself in. Sets her face in a corporate mask.

DAWN
Remember what I said about
credibility, Gary?

WEBB
You 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.

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

Sue watches Webb walk Dawn to her car. Webb comes back.

SUE
What happens now?

WEBB
They say we stand by our story.

SUE
Is that what they're saying?

WEBB
No.

Ian comes out of the house.

IAN
(straight, undeterred)
What happened in Cleveland?

Webb and Sue HOLD a long beat. What's he going to do?

WEBB
(to Ian)
Let's go in the garage.

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - GARAGE - NIGHT

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. 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.

Pause.

IAN

That sounds like an excuse. What happened in Cleveland?

WEBB

I fucked up. I stepped out on your mom. I had an affair.

IAN

Who with?

WEBB

A reporter in the newsroom. She was pretty and married 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)

Your mother found out. I broke it off. That part was easy. You and your mother were -- are -- my entire life--

IAN

(obviously there's more)

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)

It was.

IAN

All of it. You. You're shitty. Mom's amazing.

(MORE)

IAN (CONT'D)

(then)

So that's why we're here, in California?

(Webb nods)

You ran away.

WEBB

We needed a new start.

IAN

You needed it. We were just fine. We had friends. Grandpa and Grandma. Cleveland was just fine.

WEBB

Well, it's right behind us now. It's breathing right over our shoulder.

IAN

I'm disappointed in you.

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

WEBB

I understand.

INT. MERCURY NEWS NEWSROOM, SAN JOSE - DAY

Webb enters. Feeling good. Defiant. Awake. The room quiets a notch. Webb 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.

WEBB

(not noticing the crowd)

I think I have this figured out--

(clocks Carey)

Hi, Pete, when did you get in from Washington?

PETE CAREY

Nice to see you, Gary.

DAWN

Have a seat.

Dawn puts a cup of coffee in front of Webb. Webb gets the hint, 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

What's he talking about?

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.

Webb looks to Dawn. She averts her eyes.

KRIM

We didn't like some of what Pete
came back with. Some of your
sources have changed their stories.

WEBB

Of course they did.

KRIM

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

WEBB

This's how they operate.

KRIM

(mocking him)

"They"?

WEBB

The Agency. They deny. *Everything.*

All seem embarrassed for Webb.

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

We're not in a courtroom; we're all of us in this room tried by the power of public opinion. If they say they didn't say it they didn't say it. You have notes and tape, fine, but it's not what you can prove; it's what people remember.

WEBB

Call Norwin Meneses in Nicaragua.

CAREY

He said he never spoke to you.

Bang. Beat. Webb, stunned, drifts into his seat.

CAREY (CONT'D)

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 of him, Gary.

WEBB

This is nuts.

DAWN

Is it?
(then)
Maybe it was all too good to be true.

Webb looks at her a long beat. And there it is.

WEBB

They can't overthrow a government without getting their dicks caught in their fly, but they are absolutely *fantastic* at this--

DAWN

Who is--?

WEBB

You all think I'm crazy, don't you?

CEPPOS

Let's not make it personal.

WEBB

You're not the one being hung out to dry.

CEPPOS

No one's hanging you out to dry. We got in this together, and we're going to get out of this together.

WEBB

Get out of it?

Then, from the top of the table:

YARNOLD

Gary, we're killing the story.

WEBB

And just pretend we don't know what we know?

KRIM

This can't be all about you. There's a bigger picture. Open your eyes.

WEBB

My eyes are open. And you know what picture I see? 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.

(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.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

You're a newspaper that tells the truth - unless you don't feel like it.

After a long tense beat:

CEPPOS

There's something else.

EXT. NEW WEBB HOME - LOS OLIVOS WAY - DAY

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.

SUE

I mean, what the hell's in Cupertino?

WEBB

Apparently, the paper has a bureau there. It's near San Jose. 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. He goes to embrace her.

WEBB (CONT'D)
It was go to Siberia or resign.

SUE
You're not resigning.

Now Webb collapses in her arms.

EXT. MOTEL - CUPERTINO, CA - DAY

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

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - SAME

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.

INT. MERC BUREAU - STRIP MALL, CUPERTINO - DAY

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.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - NIGHT

Webb and Sue naked on their backs under the chintzy covers. Bathed in the spill from the neon motel sign outside. They're naked. They're silent. They've failed.

EXT. MOTEL - CUPERTINO - NIGHT

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

More Christmas stuff. Tinsel. Snowflake cut-outs.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - ANOTHER NIGHT

More of his shit has shown up. Photos of the kids. His motorcycle helmet and jacket.

Little fake Christmas tree in the corner. Home.

Webb's alone, sits in a T-shirt and sweat pants. He's staring at the phone. TV's on a sitcom re-run but mute. One of his notebooks is open on his lap.

We TIGHTEN ON on the notebook, on a pink "while-you-were-out" stuck in it:

The original "Coral Baca" message and number.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - NIGHT

A tall man, 6'7", walks quickly to Webb's door. Presses his ear against it. Backs into the shadows. Waits a beat. Was he followed?

He starts working the lock.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - NIGHT

Webb in bed, sits up. Watching the lock move. The door swing open. The tall figure slips in, closes the door quickly.

MAN

Don't turn on the light.

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.

(MORE)

HARRISON (CONT'D)

(then)

I know what you're trying to do.
It's about goddamn time.

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

HARRISON (CONT'D)

You need to talk to me. You needed
to talk to me six months ago.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - NIGHT

HARRISON

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 rests his hands on the table and shuts up.

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.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Webb drops in quarters and dials. Waits.

DAWN/PHONE

Dawn Garcia.

(Webb says nothing)

This is Dawn. Who is this?

(beat)

Hello?

Webb hangs up.

EXT. MOTEL - CUPERTINO - NEXT MORNING

Webb opens his door. The parking space in front is empty.

WEBB

Where's my bike?

(now panicked)

WHERE'S MY FUCKING BIKE??

And SNAP. He starts slapping at the door, punching and kicking, crying--

REVERSE POV on him from the parking lot. And see his mouth agape. And see - but not hear - him scream.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - NIGHT

UNDER THE SOUND of a dialing phone, CAMERA PANS ACROSS
"Caddyshack" on the tube ... empty bottles everywhere ... a
jar of butts and joint nubs.

AND UP TO THE WALLS

Where Webb has now reassembled the Dark Alliance story. The massive jumbled wallpaper of notes - but tripled. Every inch covered with a name, a date, a number.

He's added Harrison ... and connected Harrison with lines and arrows to Blandon ... and Meneses ... and O'Neale ... a spider web of Everything-Is-Connected.

PAN TO THE ONE CLEAR WALL. Webb has taped a new note: "CORAL BACA".

AND FINALLY DOWN TO WEBB

Where he sits on the bed, on the phone.

WEBB
 (into the phone)
 I think I know everything now.
 (beat; listens)
 I want to see you. Will you meet
 me?

INT. BAR - RITZ HOTEL - SAN FRANCISCO - NIGHT

Webb's cleaned himself up. He's lost weight, but he's walking with a swagger. He's heading to the bar.

At the end sits:

CORAL BACA

All legs, tits, flowy hair and good smell.

And Webb stops there. She can't see him through the crowd, he has a clean eye-line. And he just watches her:

The beginning of the line.

Catches a glimpse of himself in a mirror. Doesn't recognize the face he sees there.

Coral's looking around, down at her watch, toward the door. Beautiful. We WHIP PAN back around to the door ourselves.

Webb is gone.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - DAY

Filled with boxes now. And his aquarium. Not Webb moving out, but deeper in. On the wall hangs his mascot poster: *"If it's in the Kentucky Post, it's the truth."*

Webb incongruously in a tuxedo. Standing over a piece of paper at the kitchenette. Phone in the crook of his neck.

SUE/PHONE (OVER)

You sign it yet?

WEBB

(into phone)

I feel like I'm signing my death warrant.

PUSH IN TIGHT on the paper: resignation letter. Webb's hand quivers over the signature line. Refusing to touch down.

WEBB (CONT'D)

(into phone)

My first editor at the Post told me that when a reporter stops being a reporter he turns in more than his press card. He gives up his youth, he gives up fun, he gives up the only thing he ever wanted to be ... And the troubles begin.

INT./EXT. WEBB'S CAR/NEW WEBB HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT

Webb pulls up in his TR-6. In his tux. A fifth of Maker's Mark between his knees.

Stares up at his house a long beat, gets out and crosses to the door. Reaches for it. Rings the bell instead.

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
I'll tell mom you're outside.

Webb swallows half the bottle. Sue and Ian come out. Sue in a black slip dress. Sexy.

WEBB
You look fantastic.

She grabs the bourbon, takes a pull, drains it.

IAN
You guys gonna get through this?

WEBB
Absolutely.

IAN
You'll be great, dad. You always are.

WEBB
Absolutely.

IAN
Really?

WEBB
No.

He reaches for his son. Gives his arm a squeeze.

WEBB (CONT'D)
You're a hard man to live up to.

SUE
He's seventeen.

WEBB
I'm glad he's coming. It means a lot to a man when his son steps up.

Long pause. The three of them there together in their silence. Webb HOLDS a long look with Ian.

WEBB (CONT'D)
(a realization)
But I need to get out of your way.

SUE
What's that supposed to mean?

Webb looks at her. Did he speak? He didn't think so.

WEBB

Nothing, babe. I was just babbling.

IAN

I'll meet you guys there. I'll ride behind you.

Sue gets in beside Webb. Ian mounts the Triumph bike. Fully assembled. Gleaming like a wet animal. Roaring like a motherfucker. And pulls in behind Webb.

EXT. BALLROOM, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - LATER

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--

(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.

INT. BALLROOM, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - CONTINUOUS

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

The real room. Only 42 people are clapping.

At the Merc table, Dawn, Ceppos, Krim, etc. are 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. His eyes land on Sue. Her brave face.

The room excruciatingly silent. Webb pulls out typed prepared remarks. Clears his throat. But it's like he now can't read his notes. He tosses them away.

WEBB

(to the room; ad lib)

You know, my first story was about a dog that shoulda died but just 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.

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
 horse and a pile of horseshit.
 There's a kind of poetry to that,
 isn't there?

He smiles into the room. People are staring at their shoes.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 I've gotten a lot of people pissed
 off at me over the years. But I
 realize now I never got in real
 trouble before. And I think that's
 because I never wrote anything that
 really mattered.
 (serious and clear, and
 straight to Ian)
 The truth is, it's funny that I'm
 even standing here. I was a small-
 time writer, working for a small-
 time newspaper. I stumbled over
 this story. Or it stumbled over me.
 But now I know there are stories
 that are too true to tell.

He and Dawn HOLD a look.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 When I started 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)
 Who made you the arbiters of what
 the world should and should not
 know? Who made any of us God?
 (turns his whole body to
 Ian now)
 (MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

But Ian - that's my boy out there,
Ian - what happened here, what's
happening here, don't you let it
stop you or slow you down.

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 double doors 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

What just happened?

And begins to cry.

WEBB (CONT'D)

I love you, Dad. So much. I'm so
proud of you--

And he's down there with his father, hugging him around the
waist, his neck. Both holding on as if to a life preserver.

WEBB (CONT'D)

(pushing himself up)
I need some air.

IAN

Stay close. Don't go far.
(then)
(MORE)

IAN (CONT'D)

Dad!--

(Webb stops, turns)

Want me to come with you? Can I
come with you--?

WEBB

(smiles, wipes his face)

C'mon--

And they push through the doors, away from us, entwined, and
as they go out into the night, doors flapping, screen FADES
WHITE--

Now BURNS to a hot core. We're staring into lights.
Fluorescent. Now DROP DOWN to--

INT. CITY MORGUE - SACRAMENTO, CA - DAY

Webb's side of the observation glass. Sue and Ian standing
with the Attendant over his body. The absolute pale-blue
stillness of him. The bullet wounds.

ATTENDANT

I believed him, for what that's
worth. I'm so very sorry.

SUE

(crying now)

Goddammit--

Ian lifts his eyes to the glass. Beyond it, the Federal
agents, watching, chatting. As if at a busstop. HOLD on Ian's
glare, then--

SMASH CUT TO:

IAN, ON THAT TRIUMPH MOTORCYCLE.

The bike not merely assembled. But gleaming, engine purring,
ROARING through Sacramento streets away from the morgue.

Now SCREAMING up the rolling hills west of Sacramento, god's
country -- now climbing a long rise, beyond it sky -- he's
cresting -- sumitting -- beneath him now nothing but the
glittery Pacific to the horizon -- FREEZE and --

CRAWL

** Gary Webb never got another job in journalism again.*

** The CIA waited two years, then, under the chaotic distraction of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, released a 400 pp. confession, 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 was found in his bed with two gunshot wounds to 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.*

CUT TO BLACK