



Harlan Films LLC

Kill the Messenger

By

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1

INT. CITY MORGUE - SACRAMENTO, CA - DAY

1

Languid. Dreamlike. A slow-moving camera pushes into a refrigeration room of a MORGUE. A DETECTIVE, TWO UNIFORMED COPS, a MORGUE attendant, and the CORONER, are on the periphery of frame. Their conversation is indiscernible. At the center of frame is a MAN'S BODY lying on a slab, half in, half out of the morgue refrigerator. We do not see his face.

THE CAMERA APPROACHES. SLOW. Past the group of people in the room. It moves up and over the body.

IMAGE IS UPSIDE DOWN. Then--

-- CAMERA RIGHTS ITSELF.

We find ourselves looking squarely into the face of GARY WEBB: 42, handsome, masculine. Two bullet wounds to his face and head.

WE SMASH CUT TO --

-- a kaleidoscope of jump cut images and footage from the War on Drugs, both familiar and distant-- (UNDER AND THROUGH OPENING CREDITS)

2

(2-10) STOCK FOOTAGE

2

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

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

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

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

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

PRESIDENT REAGAN/FOOTAGE (OVER)
...These twin evils - narcotics and terrorism - represent the most insidious and dangerous threats to the hemisphere today.

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

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

TO LAPD GANG UNITS - helmets and truncheons - bracing a 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.

11 **EXT. FAUX SPANISH MANSION - MISSION VIEJO, CA - SIMULTANEOUS** 1

TITLE: JULY 15, 1995

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

Door opens on RONNY QUAIL, 40, nose collapsed from a lifetime of blow. LITTLE HOTTIE, 19, topless and G-string, in tow.

QUAIL

Who the fuck are you?

WEBB

Gary Webb. San Jose Mercury-News.

QUAIL

What do you want?

WEBB

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

QUAIL

(hands over heart)

Yeah yeah that's me. The accused ... c'mon in...

12 **INT. FAUX SPANISH MANSION**

12

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

WEBB

This the house they're taking?

QUAIL
I remain optimistic.

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

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

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

QUAIL
Signals, man. Blocks microwave and
radio.

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

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

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

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

Webb displays his left hand. A shiny ring.

WEBB
Relax. Married.

QUAIL
So what. So am I.

Momentary tension. Then they share a look, an understanding, maybe a smile. Brothers ... and--

A13

EXT/INT FAUX SPANISH MANSION - POOLSIDE - TIME JUMP

A13

They've been walk-and-talking for a while. Lapping the pool.

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

WEBB
 (looks at him quizzically,
 then--)
 But you did it.

QUAIL
 Did--?

WEBB
 Off the record -- you sold the
 dope.

QUAIL
 You're missing the point. They took
 the freakin roof over my head.

They enter the house, Quail begins to make coffee --

WEBB
 Okay, so I gotta just ask --
 because it's what they say -- the
 stuff you buy with dope money --
 your house, car, whatever -- you
 lose it, because it was the crime
 that paid for it.

QUAIL
 Did it, didn't do it, who gives a
 shit. They can't take a man's
 shelter. Anyway, they have to prove
 it, right? They didn't prove it. I
 wasn't convicted.

Pause, then--

WEBB
 Why is that? I mean, you don't
 exactly deny it.

Quail looking at him.

QUAIL
 You believe in conspiracy theories,
 Gary?

WEBB
 I don't believe in conspiracy
theories. Conspiracy, yes. If I
 believe it, there's nothing
 "theory" about it.

QUAIL

I like you.

A LOUD sharp sound. As if the DOOR was knocked down. Webb whirling as --

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

COPS/AGENTS/SHERIFFS

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

QUAIL

Christ. Here we go again.

The girl screams and runs.

COPS/AGENTS/SHERIFFS

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

A dozen AGENTS fan out. Some head upstairs. Some head into the basement.

Quail gives Webb a funny smile.

QUAIL

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

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

SHERIFF 1

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

SHERIFF 1 (CONT'D)

(to Webb)

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

WEBB

Hold on --

Webb reaching for an ID. Someone screams "Hands!" And Webb is mid-air, dropped on ass and back. Handcuffed.

WEBB (CONT'D)

I'm a reporter--!

DEA AGENT

Shut the fuck up!

QUAIL
 You don't know what you're messing
 with, man!

AGENTS come back with an assault rifle, shotgun.

DEA AGENT
 (to Webb)
 Where's the dope?

WEBB
 I'm the *reporter*.

QUAIL
 Don't you guys get it? I knew you
 guys were coming, man--

Sheriff 1 hands DEA Agent a radio.

COP/RADIO
 It's a burn. Dope's gone.

SHERIFF 1
 Everything sanitized, fresh paint,
 carpet. Like they knew--

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

WEBB
 You did know.

The DEA Agent slams the cleaning equipment against the wall.

QUAIL
 (to Webb)
 They're not listening.

WEBB
 I am.

13

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

13

Kit-homes and American flags. The heart of the lower-middle.

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

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

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

DAVE

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

BOB

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

(to Webb)

So how'd that feel?

WEBB

Cold--

DAVE

Did he really tin foil his whole
house? *

SUE

(from across the yard;
always listening)
Tell them about the half naked
girl. Was she old enough to drive? *

BOB

Man, I wish I had your life.

SUE

Cuz you want to be married to me?

BOB

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

SUE

Uh huh--

Dave puts a beer in Ian's hand.

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

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

15

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

15

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

IAN
Awwright, Dad!

WEBB
We'll rebuild it together.

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

WEBB (CONT'D)
Infant day before yesterday.

Sue sticks her head in. Phone in hand.

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

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

Webb tangos across the garage. Sue warding him off.

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

BOB
God, that's beautiful.

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

IAN
Yeah. I wanna ride to the hills and-

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

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

BOB
I thought you already cut
them off.

*
*

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

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

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

16

Webb heads down the basement steps to his office. It's a
reporter's lair, a quasi-organized chaos of boxes and files.
A slew of journalism awards, including a Pulitzer. Framed
stories from the *Kentucky Post* and *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*.

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

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

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

*

WEBB
 (sits at his computer)
 Is it up?

ANNA *
 Goes to press in ten.

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

WEBB *
 Where's the last graph, Anna?

ANNA *
 We ran out of inches.

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

ANNA *
 They're drug dealers, Gary.

WEBB
 Not until they're convicted.
 Because this is America. That's the
 story.

ANNA *
 Four minutes until deadline.

WEBB
 Take my name off the story.

ANNA *
 (after a silence)
 They were right about you.

WEBB
What part?

ANNA *
You're an asshole.

WEBB
(contemplating the fish in
the aquarium)
Yes I am an asshole. About this.
They were also right about you.

ANNA *
What part?

WEBB *
First in her family to go to *
college, chip on her shoulder, *
ambitious, trying to make her *
working class parents proud. *

Click. She hangs up.

18

INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - IAN'S BEDROOM - 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. Ian toes at him. And heads to the front door. Picks the *Mercury-News* off the stoop.

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

WEBB
Ask your mother.

SUE
It's none of his business.
(to Ian)
Your dad's in the doghouse and you
will be too if you're late for
school.

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

19

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

IAN
(reading Webb's story;
island of calm)
Dad, you hang with some insanely
bad people.

WEBB
Funny thing. Bad guys are usually
more honest than good guys. And
more fun. It's an inside-out world.

SUE
Life lessons by Gary Webb.

IAN
Mom, you have to read this.

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

WEBB
Gotta go gotta go gotta roll,
munchkins!

CHRISTINE
Daddy's taking us?!

*

WEBB
Train leaves in five ... four ...

20 **INT./EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LIESEL CT.**

20

Sue watches the kids pour into the shitty little car. Fights back a smile. Then picks up the paper. And starts to read.

21 **INT. NEWS BUREAU - SACRAMENTO - DAY - ESTABLISHING**

21

Webb bangs 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 into--

22

INT. SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS BUREAU - SACRAMENTO - SAME

22

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

FARRAGHER

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

WEBB

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

FARRAGHER

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

WEBB

But not the "Big One".

FAR

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

WEBB

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

They look up. A young kid in his 20's is in the doorway. He
heard that. *

RICH KLINE

Hey. *

WEBB

Boy Wonder, Rich Kline, L - A -
Times. What can I do for you? *

RICH KLINE

Hardly Boy Wonder. My editor's
pissed we missed that story.

WEBB

He should be. *

RICH KLINE
 Amazing job, by the way. Any advice
 for me? *

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

23

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

23

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

WEBB
 (calls out there)
 Who the hell is Coral Baca and why
 does she keep calling me--?
 (dialing; into phone)
 This is Gary Webb.

CORAL/PHONE
 He finally calls.

Her accent Latina. Sultry.

CORAL/PHONE (CONT'D)
 I like your work.

WEBB
 You follow my work?

CORAL/PHONE
 I do now.

WEBB
 What can I do for you?

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

WEBB
 Okay, what can you do for me?

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

WEBB

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

CORAL/PHONE

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

(then)

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

WEBB

(starts doodling)
Colombian?

CORAL/PHONE

Nicaraguan.

Absentmindedly scrawling "Cornejo". Doodling around it.

CORAL/PHONE (CONT'D)

He has this gorgeous house the government just took. Twenty-thousand-dollar Italian couch I designed myself. Handmade wallpaper. Good story, no?

WEBB

Yeah. I just wrote it.

CORAL/PHONE

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

WEBB

(pencil freezes)
Can you say that again?

CORAL/PHONE

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

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

WEBB

That's, um, a little--

CORAL/PHONE

Crazy?

WEBB
That'll work.

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

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

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

WEBB
No.

CORAL/PHONE
Then maybe you should buy me lunch.

24

INT. DINER - SACRAMENTO - DAY

24

Odd hour of day, between meals. Mostly empty.

CORAL (O.S.)
You must be Gary.

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

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

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

CORAL
What, no foreplay?

Gary does not look at her tits.

WEBB
No.

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

CORAL

This is the thing you need to see.

WEBB

Wait. Wow.

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

WEBB (CONT'D)

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

*

CORAL

The government turned it over on discovery by mistake. Russell Dodson.

WEBB

The Federal prosecutor Russell Dodson?

CORAL

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

WEBB

You called the cops on the Feds?

CORAL

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

WEBB

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

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

WEBB (CONT'D)

You read all this?

CORAL

A little.

WEBB

What's this they keep blacking out?

TRANSCRIPT: lots of redactions with thick black marker.

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

CORAL

'Danilo Blandon'. That's
who deals for the government.
(Webb reading)
He was a friend. He played with my
kid. Then he rats. Weirds me out.

WEBB

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

She points again: "*Norwin Meneses*".

CORAL

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

WEBB

They couldn't be that stupid.

CORAL

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

WEBB

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

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

CORAL

Everything is at my house --

He's not gonna look at her tits.

CORAL (CONT'D)

You wanna come over?
(he looks; fuck)
(MORE)

CORAL (CONT'D)

You want to make those part of the deal?

WEBB

Just send the documents to my office.

CORAL

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

A25 **EXT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE. SAN FRANCISCO. DAY - ESTABLISHING**A25 *

Webb makes his way into the courthouse.

25 **INT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE / GALLERY - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY** 25

Webb heads up the steps of the courthouse gallery --

A26 **INT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE / OUTSIDE OF COURTROOM - SAN FRANCISCO - CONTINUOUS**

-- Webb approaches the court room.

Outside the door of the court is Coral, dressed in a black little number suited for funerals and trials.

CORAL

(to Webb)

The judge called an early recess.

(looks across the hallway)

There's Raffie.

TWO FEDERAL MARSHALS escort Cornejo into a back room. He's handsome and in a fancy suit. He glares at Webb.

WEBB

He looks friendly.

CORAL

He doesn't like seeing me with other men.

(no shit--; she checks her watch)

Maybe this can get going --

Webb clocks a large blond MAN, 40, among a group of Federal prosecutors and a few expensive attorneys.

CORAL (CONT'D)

That's that little bitch. Dodson.

RUSSELL DODSON, 40, prom king, walks away from the group, and down the hall.

WEBB

Be right back.

Webb follows him.

26

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

26

Webb steps up into the urinal next to Dodson's.

WEBB

Gary Webb, San Jose Mercury-News.

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

DODSON

You always follow people into
bathrooms?

WEBB

No.

DODSON

Why's local news interested in this
case?

WEBB

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

DODSON

Never heard of him.

WEBB

Then why's he on your witness list?

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

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

Dodson stares at him. Then exits.

27 **EXT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE STEPS - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY** 27

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

A28 **INT. COURTHOUSE GARAGE/WEBB'S CAR - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY** A28

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

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

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

*

WEBB
 Is that what you wanted to talk
 about?

DODSON
 No.
 (then)
 Tell me how this works. For real.
 She fucking you? You think she
 wouldn't fuck me if I let her
 scumbag boyfriend go?

WEBB
 That's not how it works.

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

WEBB (CONT'D)

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

DODSON

I hate you people. *

Stop. Webb realizing, dawning on him--

WEBB

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

DODSON

You believe in redemption, Webb?

WEBB

Only when I have to.

DODSON

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

WEBB

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

DODSON

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

WEBB

Truth and justice.

DODSON

Where did you grow up?

WEBB

Indiana.

DODSON

On a farm?

(Webb nods)

With animals?

(MORE)

DODSON (CONT'D)
 (Webb nods)
 Jesus. Is that really true?

WEBB
 Everything except the animals.

DODSON
 Well, there are more important
 things than the truth, even in
 Indiana.
 (beat; then)
 Even in Cleveland.

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

WEBB
 (angry)
 We're done.

DODSON
 Good. Get the fuck out.

WEBB
 It's my car.

Right. Dodson gets out.

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

DODSON
 Reality's classified!

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

WEBB (PRE-LAP)
 I guess he forgot.

28

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

28

Anna and Webb mid-conversation. Blandon grand jury transcript *
 in her hands.

ANNA *
 (nonplussed)
 So what's the story?
 (MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

Paranoid Justice official off his meds? Feds use bad guy to catch other bad guys? It's low-hanging fruit, Gary.

WEBB

You have no idea what that is, do you?

(the transcript)

ANNA

I know what it is.

*

WEBB

Well, it's unheard of. It's a gift.

(and)

I asked around about Blandon. No one's heard of him. Why is that?

Farragher sticks his head in the door.

ANNA

Talking here--

*

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

*

WEBB

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

ANNA

Define desperate.

*

WEBB

He brought up Cleveland.

ANNA

He threatened you?

*

WEBB

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

She's thinking about it. Hesitant.

WEBB (CONT'D)

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

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

*

WEBB
I'm not old.

ANNA
And we're not the LA Times.

*

WEBB
We're not small-time either.

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

*

29

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

29

Later that evening, Gary enters the house. He throws his keys down in the foyer, walks into the kitchen. He stops at the sight of a banker's box -- "FOR GARY" in big loopy feminine script sitting like a turkey in the middle of the table. The kids around it eating fish sticks. Sue puts some more plates on the table.

ERIC
Who's Coral?

WEBB
Shit.

IAN
She's hot.

SUE
She came into my house.

IAN
She drove a Camaro.

WEBB
Of course she did.

SUE
Why does she know where you live?

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

SUE
For a story about strippers?

WEBB
Drug dealers.

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

ERIC
Is what happening again?

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

30

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

30

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

SUE
So Guatemalan drug dealers and guys
in suits?

WEBB
Nicaraguan drug dealers.

SUE
And I can't believe you gave that
woman our address. *

WEBB
I didn't. *

SUE
I don't know if that's better or
worse. *

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

Nothing.

She grabs him by the arms.

SUE

Better not.

(then)

Let's not do this again. It's why we left my family, my friends, moved out to California, which I hate, f.y.i, all this stupid sunshine and happy shiny faces.

*

WEBB

It's a new day. A Gary and Sue Webb sunrise.

SUE

I'm serious.

WEBB

So am I.

SUE

And you believe that woman?

WEBB

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

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

WEBB (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna screw this up, baby.

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

WEBB (CONT'D)

Ow.

SUE

You better not. Because you're the love of my goddamn life.

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

SUE (CONT'D)

(tightens her grip;
pulling him closer--)

(MORE)

WEBB

I pulled at a wire to see what gauge we needed and kept going.

(beat)

You think you can put this back together and fix it?

IAN

I don't know.

Webb puts him in a head lock. Playful.

WEBB

I know. Yes you can. You will.

Releases him, then walks him over to the motorcycle parts.

Squint--

(they both squint)

Electrical stuff over there, fuel stuff there, the hub and ball bearings. I know it looks like a mess but there's order to all of this.

He grabs up an old TRIUMPH REPAIR MANUAL, gives it to Ian.

WEBB

A road map to start. Then your instincts take over.

IAN

(fanning through the manual)

What if we're missing parts?

WEBB

Find new ones.

(re; book)

It's all in there. You're never alone.

Ian looks at him.

IAN

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

WEBB

You will. We will. Put it back together.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)
 Figure out how things work.
 (garage clock)
 I'm late.

Webb rushes out, leaves Ian standing over the parts. A daunting challenge.

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

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

Dodson and the DEFENSE ATTORNEYS are at sidebar with the judge. Dodson clocks Webb's entrance. Scowls. Leans into judge. *

Webb crosses to Coral in a back row. More cleavage, more jewelry, more wattage. She looks cheerful. *

WEBB
 What's going on?

CORAL
 They've been up there for a while. *

Dodson crosses back toward his table as--

JUDGE
 Charges against Mr. Cornejo are dismissed. You are free to go.

CORAL
 Very impressive, Gary Webb.

WEBB
 What just happened?

CORAL
 You terrified them. They just stuffed Danilo Blandon under a rug. He's off the witness list. No Blandon, no case. Raffie's walks. One day maybe I can thank you properly.

She leaves the courtroom. Webb catches up with her --

WEBB
 Wait a second--

He grabs her arm. Cornejo glaring from inside the courtroom.

WEBB (CONT'D)

(knowing)

You used me to get the case
dropped.

*
*

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

CORAL

I'm just the bimbo, remember?

(leans; whispers)

Be happy, Gary Webb. You thought
you were getting a piece of cheese.
But I just gave you the mouse--

*

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

CORAL (CONT'D)

There's your story. Danilo Blandon.

36

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

36

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

Above his desk, he's taping stuff up now. Mug shot of Blandon. Surveillance shot of Meneses. Then STOP. Something he's looking at. FBI report.

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

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

Webb making a list of the names he's coming across. One name is showing up twice ... then a third time.

Now Webb's digging through his clippings file. Tugs one out. An L.A. Times article, "Deposed King of Crack: This Master Marketer Was Key to the Drug's spread--"

As Webb circles the name -- "*RICKY ROSS*" -- now cut to--

37 **EXT. SANTA MONICA, CA - DAY - ESTABLISHING (STOCK FOOTAGE)** 37

A bright sun-bleached shore line. In-line skaters, volleyball and bikinis.

38 **INT. ALAN FENSTER'S LAW OFFICE/WAITING ROOM - SANTA MONICA -38 DAY**

Webb waits perspiring outside a law office. ALAN FENSTER - dapper, mid-level slip-and-fall guy, 50's - comes out.

FENSTER

Sorry about the air conditioning.
Come on in.

They back walk into his office.

39 **INT. ALAN FENSTER'S LAW OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS** 39

FENSTER

What can I do for you?

Fenster sits behind his desk.

WEBB

You represent Ricky Ross. The crack dealer.

FENSTER

Alleged crack dealer.

WEBB

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

FENSTER

Who do you write for again?

WEBB

San Jose Mercury-News.

FENSTER

Never heard of it.

FENSTER

(almost explodes)

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

WEBB

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

FENSTER

Shit. They block everything I ask
for, claiming - get this - national
security.

*
*

WEBB

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

FENSTER

(interested now)

What do you really want?

40

INT. ENTRANCE - LOS ANGELES DETENTION CENTER - LOS ANGELES -40
DAY

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

ROSS

Who's this cracker?

FENSTER

A reporter.

ROSS

Fuck you, Finster.

FENSTER

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

WEBB

Gary Webb, San Jose Mercury-News.

ROSS

The what?

WEBB

It's in northern California.

ROSS

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

FENSTER

Have the conversation, Ricky.

WEBB

What do you know about Danilo Blandon?

(no reply, so--)

He smuggled cocaine into the United States and sold it to you.

ROSS

Don't know him.

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

WEBB

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

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

GUARD (O.S.)

Sit the hell down in there!

ROSS

(pissed)
Hey, fuck you, man!

FENSTER

Ricky, siddown.

ROSS

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

WEBB

They didn't flip anyone.

ROSS

What's he talking about, Fenster?

FENSTER

Fenster.

WEBB

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

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

ROSS

You for real?

(to Fenster)

He for real?

(Webb nods; Fenster nods)

Bandon a snitch? And me his bitch?

(impressed; doing the mental telemetry)

I am impressed. They say I sold dope all over, but man, Bandon a thousand times heavier than I'll ever be. He's LA, he's New York, he's Atlanta. He's everywhere, man.

WEBB

He's that big?

ROSS

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

WEBB

You mean demand.

ROSS

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

*
*

FENSTER

Allegedly, Ricky.

ROSS

Allegedly, I gave that spic six million a week!

*

WEBB
That's impossible.

ROSS
Is it? Am I exaggerating, Finster?

FENSTER
I hope so.

ROSS
That shit's real.

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

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

WEBB
It would have to be a monster operation.

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

(and sits back--)
I was the best mailman there was. But I was still just a mailman--

WEBB
Jesus.

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

41 EXT./INT. WEBB'S CAR - STREET CORNER - WATTS, LA - DAY 41

Webb and Fenster in Fenster's Mercedes.

*

Across the street, post-Apocalyptic urban blight: Nickerson Gardens housing project. Detritus and decay. Dope -- and its desolations -- everywhere. *

FENSTER *

Ricky grew up a few blocks from here. I can never remember which building. *

Webb gets out of the car. *

FENSTER (CONT'D) *

No, don't get out of the car! *

Webb keeps walking, down the street, for a closer look into the projects. As he walks, he sees -- *

-- GANGBANGERS in hoodies and strung-out CUSTOMERS and GANG SOLDIERS and LOOKOUTS.

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

-- dope deals going down behind screen doors.

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

He returns to the car and gets in. *

WEBB *

Look at this place. It used to be families. They weren't terrified to walk down the street. The gangs just had knives and baseball bats. Pump this community full of cheap coke and look what happens. Now they carry AK-47s and Uzis. *

FENSTER *

Which is why we should get out of here. *

Fenster goes to start the car, but Gary stops him. *

WEBB *

What about this doesn't upset you? *

FENSTER *

It's complicated for me. *

WEBB
What's complicated about it? *

FENSTER
I'm Ricky's lawyer. *

WEBB
Well I need you to help me. I need
to talk to Blandon. *

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

WEBB
I can't. But you can.

FENSTER
Yes. I can. *

CUT TO: *

A42 **OMITTED**

A42

42 **INT. FEDERAL COURT ROOM - LOS ANGELES - DAY**

42

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

On the stand: DANILO BLANDON. Fancy suit.

DODSON

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

BLANDON

Cocaine. Not crack.

DODSON

I apologize.

(not really)

The Defendant received delivery of
pure Colombian cocaine and then
diluted it, portioned and cooked it
into mountains of crack many orders
of magnitude greater, and then sent
all that into the streets of Los
Angeles.

*

*

*

*

*

*

BLANDON

(simply)

Yes.

*

DODSON

Thank you. No further questions.

Dodson sits back down. Done.

JUDGE

Mr. Fenster, your witness.

FENSTER

Thank you, your honor.

Now Dodson clocks Webb. Cocks his head. And rising--

DODSON
Approach, your honor?

JUDGE
 (waves him off)
 Later.

*

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

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

DODSON
 Objection! Relevance! Inflammatory!

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

JUDGE
 Overruled.

FENSTER
 Mr. Blandon?

BLANDON
 Yes.

FENSTER
 Yes what?

BLANDON
 The government knew.

FENSTER
 Everything?

DODSON
 Objection. Speculation.

*

*

JUDGE
 Sustained.

*

*

FENSTER

(back to Blandon)

Mr. Blandon, please tell us how many doses of crack cocaine you put onto the streets of Los Angeles every week.

BLANDON

Three, give or take.

FENSTER

Three thousand? Hundred thousand?

BLANDON

Million.

Audible hush over the courtroom.

FENSTER

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

BLANDON

One and a half billion dollars.

The hush replaced by a murmur, then open chatter. Dodson whispers to two Agents, who quickly leave.

FENSTER

And what did you do with the money?

BLANDON

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

Webb hands Fenster a note. Fenster reads it, then -

FENSTER

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

BLANDON

(proud)

Yes. I was Number Two.

FENSTER
Do you happen to know who was
Number One?

DODSON
Objection. Relevance.

JUDGE
Sustained.

So Fenster tacks left instead--

FENSTER
Is it true that Norwin Meneses was
your partner at the time?

BLANDON
He was.

DODSON
(sotto)
Christ--

FENSTER
And was Norwin Meneses at that time
Number One on the the DEA most
wanted list? The most hunted
trafficker in the nation?

BLANDON
He was.

Pause. One shoe down. The other about to drop--

FENSTER
So the two of you were in
communication with the Federal
Government together?
(Blandon nods)
Who in the Federal Government were
you and Mr. Meneses in
communication with? Who were you
working with?

BLANDON
You want a name?

FENSTER
Or a what. Was it the FBI--?

Blandon looking to Dodson for a lifeline.

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

FENSTER
CIA?
(Blandon nods)
The Central Intelligence Agency?

BLANDON
Yeah.

FENSTER
Not the Drug Enforcement Agency?

BLANDON
Well, them too.

Webb nods to Fenster. "Okay. Now."

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

JUDGE
Approach!

Dodson and Fenster approach.

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

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

JUDGE
Well he is.

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

JUDGE
I don't like it, but I'm not going
to stop it. For now.

DODSON

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

JUDGE

Not a chance.

DODSON

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.

Dodson and Fenster return to their places.

FENSTER

What did the CIA have you do, Mr. Bandon? *

DODSON *

Objection! Relevance! *

JUDGE *

Overruled. Mr. Bandon, answer the question. *

BLANDON *

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

WEBB *

(to himself) *

Did he just say Contras? *

Webb - vibrating. Dodson looks as if he could kill Fenster. *

FENSTER *

Did you specifically tell the CIA that you were selling cocaine to buy guns and supplies to support its cause? *

Dodson rises from his seat. *

DODSON

Objection! This is an absurd, your Honor. This line of questioning has no relevance.

JUDGE

Overruled.

Fenster nods to Blandon to answer the question.

BLANDON

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

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

FENSTER

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

BLANDON

Yes.

(then)

It accepted my application for political asylum.

Fenster looks back at Webb and smiles. Victory.

43

INT. MERCURY-NEWS NEWSROOM- SAN JOSE -DAY

43

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

*

44

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

Webb, Anna and Ceppos.

*

ANNA

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.

WEBB

That backwater was where America was going to win the Cold War. Except Congress hated Reagan's guts. They refused to fund his little Contra war. So the White House needed money, lots and lots of money.

*

CEPPOS

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

ANNA

Just wait, Jerry. Let him finish.

WEBB

One of the DEA's most wanted - not only not in jail for eternity but apparently on the government payroll.

*

*

*

ANNA

Testifying for the Feds like a trained monkey.

WEBB

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

CEPPOS

For who?

WEBB

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

Pause. Ceppos absorbing all that.

CEPPOS
Jesus. What are we really saying?

WEBB
I don't know everything yet.

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

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

*

Pause. Ceppos not pleased.

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

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

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

*

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

WEBB
We do now.

CEPPOS
What CIA sources do you have?

WEBB
None yet.

CEPPOS
Get one. What are they saying
officially?

WEBB
They're not even calling me back.

CEPPOS
I want that in the story.
(Anna nods) *
We're completely exposed on this.

ANNA *
Nothing runs until we have it all.

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

And leaves them alone.

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

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

WEBB
Who's they?

ANNA *
The government. The CIA--

WEBB
Who's asking permission?

ANNA *
(looks at him)
Okay, so what's next.

WEBB
Norwin Meneses.

ANNA *
Where is he?

WEBB

In a prison in Managua.

ANNA

Okay. Everything through me. All travel through my office. I want regular updates. And notes on everything.

*

45

OMIT

45

A45

INT. COURTHOUSE - SAN FRANCISCO - MORNING

A45

Rafael Cornejo, tan, country club whites, and Coral Baca, walk through the lobby of the court house. They find --

-- Webb standing against a column.

WEBB

Hi.

CORNEJO

So what do you want?

*
*

WEBB

Norwin Meneses.

CORAL

I thought I told you to be happy.

WEBB

I need to talk to him.

*

CORNEJO

He don't talk to nobody.

WEBB

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

Cornejo looks at him. Then--

CORNEJO

You fuck Coral?

*

WEBB

Nope.

CORNEJO

You think about it?

WEBB

Yep.

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

CORNEJO
Norwin's in a prison in Managua,
Nicaragua.

*
*

WEBB
(unflinching)
I want to see him. I want you to
tell him I'm coming.

*
*
*

CORNEJO
That's it?

*
*

WEBB
No. Make sure he wants to see me.

*
*

A46 **EXT. NICARAGUA. DAY (STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY)** A46

Aerial shot. The camera moves over the hills of Nicaragua.
(Stock Photography)

B46 **INT/EXT. MANAGUA STREETS. DAY** B46 *

Webb in the back of a taxi on a crowded city street.

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

Fortress walls. The taxi pulls up to the front of the prison.
Webb gets out.

47 **EXT. VISITOR'S WAITING AREA - TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY** 47

A courtyard outside the prison walls. There's a long line of
visitors waiting to get in. Armed GOONS with AK-47s guard the
area.

Webb's at the back of the line. He spots the Warden, flashes
his card from a distance. The WARDEN waves him to the front.
Webb, nervous, hands the WARDEN his card. Under the card,
folded to the same dimensions, are three hundred-dollar
bills.

48

INT./EXT. TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY

48

A prison guard escorts Webb down a corridor just outside of the prison yard. Seated there, a tanned MAN dressed in silk and slippers. Reading Borges. NORWIN MENESES, 45. The inmate potentate. A YOUNG INMATE beside him. Even the guards attend to him. This prison is his.

MENESES

(perfect English)

What took you so long?

(then)

No other journalist has tried to find me. Don't you find that surprising?

WEBB

Yes. Yes I do.

MENESES

Do you play golf, Mr. Webb?

WEBB

No, I play Hockey.

*
*

49

INT. PRISON COURTYARD - TIPITAPA PRISON - DAY

49

Meneses leads Webb into the sun-bleached prison yard. He walks over to a Guard that is minding his golf clubs. He asks the guard for a FIVE IRON in SPANISH.

*
*
*

He takes it, walks over to Webb.

*

MENESES

A five iron. It is perfectly designed to pull off any shot, if you use it properly. A tool that can carve its way through any shot necessary. It can even slice a man open if you know how to use it properly.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

An inmate lackey places a ball on a tee.

*

MENESES (CONT'D)

*

(swings)

*

It's easy to think this is only about drugs.

(MORE)

MENESES (CONT'D)

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

*
*

WEBB

Or watch from the deck of your
yacht.

MENESES

My yacht?

*

WEBB

Yes. Your yacht, your mansions. You
were arrested for narcotics
trafficking the first time in 1975.
Ten years before the Contra war. I
don't really see you as a Freedom
Fighter.

*
*
*

Meneses smiles, swings.

*

WEBB (CONT'D)

Did it have to be drugs?

*

MENESES

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

WEBB

How'd this all start?

MENESES

(considers this; then,
carefully--)

When Ollie walked into the DEA in
Washington, in the early days --

*
*

WEBB

-- Oliver North?

*
*

MENESES

Who else would it be? He suggested
that cash seized in cocaine arrests
be used to support the war. They
looked at him like he was crazier
than hell. They declined, of
course, politely. Because he was
close to the President.

*
*

(beat)

Then Nicaraguan frog men in wet
suits were landing on the shores of
San Francisco, below the Golden
Gate Bridge, beaching bales of my
cocaine.

*

(beat, swings)

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

*
*
*

WEBB

Here?

MENESES

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

WEBB

Why are you being so helpful?

*
*

MENESES

Redemption.

(beat)

Mr. Webb. What price would you be
willing to pay for your country's
freedom? Your life?

*
*
*
*
*
*

WEBB
 Why should I trust you? How do I
 know your story is true?

MENESES
 I am the story.

Webb considers this.

MENESES (CONT'D)
 You will have the whole truth, but
 then you will be faced with the
 greatest decision of your life.

WEBB
 And that is?

MENESES
 Deciding whether to share it or
 not.
 (beat)
 Do you have a family Mr. Webb?

WEBB
 Yes.

Meneses takes one last swing, then --

MENESES
 Like I said.

A50

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A50

A Range Rover speeding along the loosely paved ragged remains
 of road. Through oven heat and whirlpooling dust. Webb with
 HANSJORG BOSCH, driving. A UBS BANKER in a suit and loose
 tie. It's 100-degrees.

BOSCH
 Cessnas, Piper Cubs landed here
 twice a day. But it was the DC-3's
 that were the workhorses. Two,
 three times a week--

As the jungle parts to reveal--

50

EXT. WAREHOUSE - JUNGLE AIRSTRIP - CONTINUOUS

50

The airstrip long, for big planes, mostly overgrown. The Nicaraguan mountains are seen in the distance.

They drive up to a skeleton of a warehouse half-collapsed, sun-bleached.

Webb gets out, stares at what's left of the warehouse.

WEBB

How many of these?

BOSCH

(recalling)

In total, maybe fifty transport depots. From Colombia to Nicaragua. And from there, to here, to your country--

WEBB

Weapons in there?

BOSCH

Weaponry. Girlfriends for the generals. And then for transport back the other way, north -- cocaine. Lots and lots of cocaine.

*
*
*

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

-- Webb and Bosch turn. TWO vehicles speeding toward them.

A group of Nicaraguan MEN with GUNS jump out of the vehicles. They're ragtag, Nicaraguan militia.

SOLDIER 1

(guns pointed)

What are you doing here? You're trespassing!

BOSCH

(to Webb)

Don't answer that.

SOLDIER 1

(to Bosch)

Shut up!

(to both of them)

Identification!

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

SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)

Prensa--?

(hands it back)

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

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

CUT TO:

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

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

52 **EXT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING - WASHINGTON, DC - DAY** 52

Webb gets out of cab, walks up to the entrance of a government building.

CUT TO:

Moments later. He's on the phone with Anna. He keeps an eye on the entrance to the building. *

ANNA/PHONE *

You're where?

WEBB/PHONE

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

ANNA/PHONE (OVER) *

Upstairs is getting nervous. You're supposed to be back here.

WEBB/PHONE

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

ANNA/PHONE (OVER) *

But the drugs came here?

WEBB/PHONE

I'm not talking about drugs.

(Beat)

Look. I changed planes in Miami. I kept all the receipts. I'll pay my own flight back if you want. But we can't do this on the phone. I don't want to do this on the phone.

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

WEBB

I have to go.

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

WEIL

Who are you?

WEBB

Gary Webb, San Jose Mercury-News.

WEIL

Never heard of it.

(keeps going)

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

WEBB

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

Weil slows, gets a good look at Webb's ragged clothes. Then the thing in Webb's hand. The GJ transcript. He stops.

WEIL

Dammit.

Webb and Weil sitting on the edge of the Reflecting Pool. Capitol building in the background. A parade of joggers and tourists passing by. Weil looks grim.

WEIL

Can I eat my lunch at least?

(the papers on Webb's
knee)

That's classified. How did you get
it?

WEBB

A drug dealer gave it to me.

WEIL

Perfect.

(disgusted, throws his
lunch away)

Listen, I was John Kerry's lead
investigator on the senate sub
committee that investigated this.
It's a nightmare. You have no idea
what you're getting into.

*
*
*
*

WEBB

So then you tell me. What am I
getting into?

*
*
*

WEIL

I'm on the National Security
Council now. And I have the trust
of the President and his cabinet.
It took me ten years to get back to
that place.

(grabs the papers)

Everyone who touched this was
destroyed. I lost my marriage, my
job. My ex convinced the court my
kids were in jeopardy just being in
proximity to me. I lost them too
for a while.

WEBB

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

Pause. Weil looks at him.

WEIL

What do you want from me?

WEBB

Tell me about Blandon and Meneses.

WEIL

They're the symptom, not the disease.

Joggers approach. Weil waits, then:

WEIL (CONT'D)

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

WEBB

The CIA.

WEIL

(nods)

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

*

WEBB

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

WEIL

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

WEBB

It's too stupid to be true.

WEIL

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

WEBB

Why doesn't everyone know about this?

WEIL

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

WEBB

Hold on a second--

WEIL

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

(after a long beat)

Ever do anything like this before?

(Webb shakes, No)

Has your paper?

*

WEBB

Not that I know of.

WEIL

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

WEBB

What are you telling me?

WEIL

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

(MORE)

WEIL (CONT'D)

Senate, he got a phone call telling him that if he talked to me he'd die.

(looks at Webb; seen this all before)

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

WEBB

This is a true story.

WEIL

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

WEBB

That's insane.

WEIL

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

A beat. Webb not exactly appreciating Weil's dryness-- *

WEBB

Then what's your point?

WEIL

You have a family?

WEBB

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

WEIL

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

A54

INT. SACRAMENTO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT/PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT *

Interior elevator. It's late. Webb, exhausted, wrung out. A few other travelers, a man and a woman, are behind him. Door opens-- *

Webb walks out. The woman walks in the opposite direction. The man follows Webb. *

As Webb gets closer to his car, he becomes all too aware that the man is right on his heels. Is he being followed? Webb peeks over his shoulder. Maybe the guy's going to his car that's next to Webb's.

Webb finally turns around. The man veers off to his car two spaces from Webb's. He gets in. Takes a beat before he starts up his car.

Webb laughs to himself. Paranoia.

54 **OMITTED** 54

55 **INT. BEDROOM, WEBB'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT** 55

The sheets with an apres-sex chaos about them.

Webb is by the window facing out. Alone. He takes a hit from a roach.

Sue wanders in from the bathroom wrapped in a towel. She comes up behind him, kisses his neck.

WEBB

You want?

She takes a drag.

SUE

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

WEBB

Really?

SUE

(thinking again)
No, not really. Too crowded in there. Too many ghosts and bad guys and scary monsters running around.

*
*

WEBB

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

SUE
No. But it has to be you--

WEBB
Is that a question?

SUE
Would it matter if it was?

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

SUE
And it's true.

WEBB
It's true.

SUE
(takes him in)
It's actually the first of the sexy
things I loved about you.
(and)
I'm proud of this part of you. I'd
never ask you not to do it--
(and hands him his pillow)
Just get this one over with.

WEBB
(staring at the pillow;
she's telling him to go
downstairs)
We just made love.

SUE
Now go away.

Phone rings. Webb, annoyed, picks up.

DODSON/PHONE (OVER)
It's Russell Dodson.

WEBB
Hello, Russell Dodson.

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

(MORE)

DODSON/PHONE (OVER) (CONT'D)
 (Webb lights up)
 Hello?

WEBB
 I'm listening.

DODSON/PHONE (OVER)
 Someone will contact you tomorrow.

56

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

56

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

SUE
 Gary?

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

SUE (CONT'D)
 You hear that?

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

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

57

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

57

Webb pulls up to a modest office building squirreled away in shabby anonymity. A sparse parking lot. Just three to four cars.

A58

INT. LOBBY. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

A58

Moments later. Gary's alone in the lobby waiting for the elevator. No one's around. Creepy. He glances at a post it re: meeting info.

CUT TO:

58

INT. OFFICE CORRIDORS/CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

58

A man in a suit guides Webb down a hallway with no signage or information. It seems rented. *

They enter a conference room --

-- TWO FEDERAL AGENTS (DEA) dressed in SUITS are seated around a table. Two we recognize from court. *

There's a man dressed in a button up shirt and khakis seated off to the side.

MILLER *

Gary. Thanks for coming. I'm agent Miller. This is agent Jones. *

The KHAKIS MAN is not introduced.

MILLER (CONT'D) *

Can we get you a cup of coffee? How about one of those cappuccinos? We just got a new espresso machine, probably cost the taxpayers thirty grand. *

WEBB

I'm fine.

MILLER

(to Agent)

Get him a cappuccino.

(beat)

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

JONES

We didn't fuck up--

MILLER

We fucked up.

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

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

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

WEBB

How do you know that?

MILLER

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

But obviously so much more--

WEBB

Am I being followed?

JONES

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

WEBB

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

JONES

What you want to say happened never
happened.

WEBB

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

MILLER

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

JONES

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

MILLER

Why not just let the past stay in
the past?

WEBB

(flash of anger)
But you guys keep making the same
mistake. When do you learn how *not*
to screw things up?

MILLER

American kids, American soldiers,
were going to die.

WEBB

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

That lays there like an armed grenade.

KHAKIS MAN

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

WEBB

(head snaps around; then)
This was a mistake.
(and he's up, headed to
the door)

*
*

MILLER

What if we can deliver something
even better than Blandon?

WEBB

Are you people even allowed to be
doing this?

Webb is out the door.

*

MILLER
 (as Gary leaves)
 Glad we had a chance to meet, Gary.

59

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

59

We're at a conference table. Webb, Anna Simons, Jerry Ceppos, *
 Managing Editor, JONATHAN YARNOLD, and other SUITS.

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

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

ANNA *
 Meaning it's not just a CIA story.

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

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

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

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

WEBB

We're running out of time.

YARNOLD

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

Slight hesitation. Anna again looks to Webb. He nods. *

ANNA *

It's locked down.

YARNOLD

Then we're in. A hundred percent.

CEPPOS

Bring it home.

60

(60-72B) INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - EARLY EVENING

60

Webb stares up at the tacked up index cards. Rough flow-charts showing the ways money and weapons flowed from LA to Nicaragua, and the way the drugs flowed from Nicaragua to LA. And the names of the players ... Blandon, Meneses, Ross, CIA.

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

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

Webb gets close to the wall, studying the rough-flow charts showing the ways the dope flowed from Columbia to California.

QUICK CUTS--

CLOSE on a crate filled with bladders of cocaine. The lid closes. FROZEN FISH logo.

A DC-3 is loaded with the FROZEN FISH crates in the middle of the Columbian jungle. It's 100 degrees.

The DC 3 takes off. The pilot in the cockpit. He wears a WINDBREAKER.

The DC 3 lands somewhere in the United States. .

THE DC 3 is unloading the same crates with fork lifts. The WINDBREAKER MAN helps.

The crates are loaded into cargo vans.

The vans on American interstates. *

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

CLOSE in a LARGE POT. The COCAINE hardens. CRACK Cocaine on several trays.

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

RICKY ROSS in a nondescript shit hole apartment. He's feeding bricks of cash into a counting machine.

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

CLOSE ON a BOX marked GLASSWARE loaded with CASH.

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

A JUNGLE AIRSTRIP in NICARAGUA. The WINDBREAKER MAN unloading the same boxes by hand with the help of several Nicaraguans.

The WINDBREAKER MAN is met by waiting pick-ups and a WHITE AMERICAN dressed in full khakis. His guys load the crates onto the trucks.

TO the Swiss Banker, BOSCH, talking to Blandon inside the rotunda of BANK SUISSE.

BACK TO WEBB in his office. He starts TYPING.

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

BACK TO WEBB. More typing.

73 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE/CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - LATE THAT NIGHT** 73 *

The middle of the night. Next to sleeping Christine. Webb's up. Wide awake. *

A sound from outside. Webb makes his way into the living room, looks out the window. He sees something.

He makes his way back into the kitchen. He reaches above a cabinet, finds a hand gun.

Fast, alert, soundlessly, Webb goes to the front door, carefully opens it --

74 **EXT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - CONTINUOUS** 74

Webb steps out onto the lawn. He carefully approaches his TR - 6 on the driveway.

There's SOMEONE on his knees on the other side of the TR-6. Webb cocks the gun.

WEBB

I see you. And I have a gun.

The FIGURE does not move. A TENSE beat.

Webb fires the gun in the air to scare the guy.

The intruder BOLTS. We get a glimpse: he's white, groomed.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Hey!

Webb takes off after him into the street. He aims the gun. Hold. Adrenalin pumping as he watches the man run away. Should he pull the trigger? The man disappears into the darkness. Webb lowers his gun, stands there, frozen....what is happening?

The NEIGHBORHOOD comes alive. Neighbors' lights go on. A dog starts barking.

75 **OMITTED**

75 *

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

76

TWO POLICE CARS and ONE DETECTIVE car parked in front of the WEBB house. Two COPS and a DETECTIVE question Webb. Sue is by his side. *

In the background, two other COPS, and another DETECTIVE speak with TWO MEN in SUITS (DEA)? They flash a badge to the Detective and walk past them towards the house. *

WEBB

The guy was messing with my car. *

DETECTIVE

What guy?

WEBB

I told you. The intruder.

DETECTIVE

Who doesn't seem to exist.

WEBB

He does! I saw him!

DETECTIVE

Okay, so then you try to kill him?

WEBB

I was defending my family.

DETECTIVE

So he was inside the house?

WEBB

No, he was out here. The guy wasn't just trying to boost my car. I think he was doing something else.

DETECTIVE

Like what, planting a bomb?

(to the cop)

Any bombs?

COP

No bombs.

DETECTIVE

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

Pause. Webb hesitates, considers answering that. Looks
around: not a sympathetic face in uniform. He looks at Sue.
She's worried. *

IAN(O.S.) *

Dad!! *

77

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE

77

Webb bum-rushing ahead of the Cops into his office. Sue is
behind him. One of the SUITS is nosing up to Webb's walls.
Perusing the index cards. Sue blocking another man from
Webb's desk. Ian is off to the side. *

WEBB

What the hell?

Sue gets into the guy's face. *

SUE

You have no right to be in here. *

SUIT

It's a crime scene.

WEBB

Who the hell are you?

The Suit keeps fingering through the files. Sue SHOVES at him
hard. It hardly registers.

WEBB (CONT'D)

GET - OUT - OF - OUR - HOUSE!! *

The SUIT backs away, leaves, not before he locks eyes with
Gary. It's a cold stare. Sue tracks this. Now there's fire in
Webb's eyes. He quickly grabs a hockey stick, hands it to
Ian.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Anyone tries to look at any of this
stuff hit him with this.

Webb runs after the Suit. *

78

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

78

Webb follows the Suit into the street. Sue is right behind him. Webb's NEIGHBORS staring hostilely at him now.

WEBB
(as the Buick drives off)
Hey! Get back here!

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

WEBB (CONT'D)
I know that car!

SUE
Let it go, Gary.
(calming him)
Let it go.

79

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

79

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

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

WEBB
This is my job.

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

She carries her sleepy daughter back to her bedroom.

*

80

INT. WEBB'S HOME OFFICE - NEXT DAY

80

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

ANNA/PHONE (OVER)
Don't worry.

*

WEBB/PHONE
Anna.

*

ANNA/PHONE (OVER)
Yes, Gary. I got it. Go enjoy your
family.

*

DISSOLVE TO:

86 **EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN - DAY**

86

The entire Webb family enjoying themselves by the lake.

87 **INT. LAKESIDE CABIN - NIGHT**

87

In the Kitchen area, Webb and Sue among the hockey crew. Bob, wives, spawn. Reefer and beer. Progeny asleep on couches.

IAN
(o.s.)
Dad! It's up! It's online!

In the DEN -- Dave, Gary's other hockey buddy, at a computer. IAN is with him. PUSH on 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

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..."

IAN (CONT'D)

Oh my god. It's everywhere. The story just went up and it's freakin everywhere!

BOB

Gary? ... Where's Gary?

Sue wanders over to the window, looks out --

88

EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN. NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

88

Webb, alone, staring into a camp fire. Primal. And drinking.

Sue appears out of the darkness.

SUE

(into his ear)

You did it, baby.

(Gary smiles. Loves his woman)

Let's go fool around in the woods.

She takes him by the hand and leads him away from the house, deep into the dark woods.

89

EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN - NEXT MORNING

89

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

CEPPOS/PHONE

(excited)

Gary. I'm sitting here with Anna. *

You should see our switchboard.

Every line pinned.

ANNA/PHONE *

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

WEBB

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

ANNA/PHONE *

Anything you need. But take a victory lap.

(MORE)

ANNA/PHONE (CONT'D)

We're just calling to say thanks
for doing this. There's a lot of
pride here this morning.

(then)

Hey, Gary?

WEBB

Yeah, Anna? *

ANNA/PHONE *

This is the Big One. You did it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MANSFIELD

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

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

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

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

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

MANSFIELD/PHONE (OVER)
Walter, Marc Mansfield.

INTERCUT Zuckerman AND MANSFIELD.

94

INT. MANSFIELD'S OFFICE - CIA HQ - DAY

94

MANSFIELD
You usually sound happier to hear from me.

ZUCKERMAN
Not today.

MANSFIELD
Who the hell's Gary Webb?

ZUCKERMAN
A nobody, as far as I can tell. Clearly no understanding of how this town works.
(then)
I know I don't need to tell you this, but if this story stands, some of your people are going to jail. And I might have to retire.

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

ZUCKERMAN
The Washington Post is always open-minded.

95

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

95

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

EDITOR
I, for one, didn't think the writing was very good.
(MORE)

EDITOR (CONT'D)

The Mercury-News is one step removed from being a supermarket circular.

WOLINSKY

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

KLINE

I'm sorry, Leo.

WOLINSKY

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

KLINE

Parts of it.

WOLINSKY

Apparently the wrong parts.

EDITOR

We had Blandon in one of our stories.

WOLINSKY

As what?

KLINE

Government source.

WOLINSKY

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

Long loud silence. Wolinsky picks up the Merc.

WOLINSKY (CONT'D)

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

KLINE

It's thin. *

(then) *

Except he posted all his sources on the Merc web site-- *

(they look at him) *

And what they told him. *

EDITOR *

So what? *

KLINE *

No one's ever done that before. *

Beat. They take that in. *

EDITOR *

Still reads like a fairy tale. *

WOLINSKY

Well this fairy tale is going to win this guy a Pulitzer. Unless we take it away from him.

(then) *

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?

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.

(MORE)

DAN RATHER (CONT'D)
 Talk-radio stations all over the
 country are deluged with calls.
 (widen to reveal--)

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

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

LOCAL TV BROADCAST
 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:

TED KOPPEL
 --a reporter at the San Jose
 Mercury News suggested in a series
 of articles that the CIA might have
 played a role in permitting
 Nicaraguan drug dealers to
 distribute crack cocaine in South
 Central, Los Angeles during the
 1980s that story had enormous
 resonance within the African
 American community.

NOW FOOTAGE OF URBAN DEVASTATION IN WATTS. Of African-American community leaders. The frenzy. Real anger. Then:

JOHN DEUTCH
 ("CIA Director John
 Deutch")
 There is no connection whatsoever
 between the CIA and cocaine
 traffickers. But I have called for
 an internal investigation to
 commence immediately.

WIDEN TO ROOM

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

BACK TO TV

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

Title: *"Representative Maxine Waters, D - California"*

MAXINE WATERS

(shaking with rage)

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

(then)

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

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

*

ANNA

*

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

CEPPOS

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

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

CEPPOS (CONT'D)
A little token of our appreciation.
Take a few days off. We're gonna
need you fresh for the press
circuit.

He pats him on the back. Anna smiles, and the two walk out. *

Webb opens the envelope. A CHECK for \$500.00.

98

EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN - ANOTHER DAY - MAGIC HOUR

98

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

WEBB
I'm a pain in the ass.

SUE
Yeah you are.

WEBB
I'm sorry.

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

WEBB
Am I?

SUE
And you were right about the story.

WEBB
Yeah.

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

A99

INT. NEWSROOM. SAN JOSE MERC. BULLPEN

A99

Anna, Ceppos, Yarnold, and a group of reporters are gathered in front of a TV watching Webb being interviewed by Chris Mathews. *

99

-- INT. POLITICS STAGE - NEW YORK/D.C. - DAY

99

Webb sitting across from Chris Matthews. (Interview is seen on TV monitor).

CHRIS MATTHEWS

(to camera)

-- Gary Webb, reporter for the San Jose Mercury newspaper is the author of the piece that makes these claims.

(to Webb)

Mr. Webb, serious charges, what have you got?

WEBB

Um, what do you want? I mean --

CHRIS MATTHEWS

(ambush)

-- What have you got to prove that Americans working in the US gov't collaborated in selling drugs and pushing drugs, hard drugs, crack cocaine, into the African American community of Los Angeles?

WEBB

Well, first of all, we never said that Americans working in the gov't were doing this- these were Nicaraguans working for a CIA-run army.

CHRIS MATTHEWS

So it's Nicaraguans working for the --

WEBB

-- the FDN. Contras.

*

CHRIS MATTHEWS

Ok, it's not, now it's not CIA US officials.

WEBB

Not that we know of so far.

CHRIS MATTHEWS

(checks notes)

Okay, it's not US officials, ok, go ahead.

WEBB

And what we know is, is that these, these cocaine dealers who were working for the army met with CIA agents, uh, again Nicaraguans who were hired by the CIA to run the army and they met with them before they started dealing cocaine and during the time that they were dealing cocaine and we have pictures of them meeting, we have sworn statements that this occurred and we have --

*
*
*

CHRIS MATTHEWS

-- Let's, let's get back to the charge that the CIA, US officials, were involved in pushing drugs in Los Angeles.

CUT TO:

A100

INT. ANOTHER SOUND STAGE. DAY

A100

LIVE in a studio, A FEMALE ANCHOR interviews Webb. We pick it up mid interview --

FEMALE ANCHOR

-- you're saying they're not CIA people?

WEBB

Not saying that either. The CIA uses cut-outs. Foreign nationals. That keeps American fingerprints off secret operations. No CIA payroll stubs. So if anything goes sideways--

(mock surrender)

--the CIA can say, What? Who? Me?

(then)

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

FEMALE ANCHOR

A lot of people are now saying, of course, including people in Congress, that the CIA pushed drugs into South Central Los Angeles and that the CIA and big government types intentionally addicted African Americans to crack cocaine.

WEBB

What you and others are doing is putting words in my mouth. We never made that claim--

FEMALE ANCHOR

Never?

WEBB

Never. It was a screw-up. What the CIA wanted to do was get tricky to fight a war Congress didn't want. What happened in South Los Angeles, and other American cities, was a--

FEMALE ANCHOR

Mistake?

WEBB

A mistake. A very very bad mistake.

FEMALE ANCHOR

(to camera)

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

Stage goes dark. Break for commercial.

FEMALE ANCHOR (CONT'D)

(to surrounding staff,
producer types)

Who told me this guy was full of it?!

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

100

EXT. TWO-LANE ROAD - ANOTHER DAY

100

Near the CABIN HOUSE, Webb is on his motorcycle, riding fast through the rolling hills, god's country.

101 INT. BODEGA. MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - DAY 101

DOUG FARAH - a reporter from the WASHINGTON POST. He's on a HOUSE PHONE speaking with --

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

-- Zuckerman in a conference room. Speaker phone on the table. *

ZUCKERMAN

Jackson Diehle's here with me, from foreign. *

ANGLE - JACKSON DIEHLE, 50, Foreign Desk Editor. *

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

FARAH

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

Zuckerman and Diehle exchange worried glances.

ZUCKERMAN

Where in the north did it come from?

FARAH

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

JACKSON DIEHLE

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

FARAH

The banker isn't a drug dealer. And two of the others were bag men for Oliver North.

(MORE)

FARAH (CONT'D)

There's also an American ex-pat who's had a ranch in the jungle for thirty years, and he let the planes land and take off on his airstrip, and he let them store dope on his property. So yeah, I'd say the story's reliable.

ZUCKERMAN

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

FARAH

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

ZUCKERMAN

I have better information that says otherwise.

FARAH

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

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

FARAH (CONT'D)

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

Farah hangs up.

JACKSON DIEHLE

So what's our point of view?

ZUCKERMAN

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

JACKSON DIEHLE

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

Webb, Sue and the kids are watching the network news. New furniture added to the old. Big new color TV. Over-scene we hear a newscaster --

NEWSCASTER/TV

(o.c.)

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.

NEWSCASTER/TV (OVER) (CONT'D)

And that the CIA is responsible for the crack epidemic.

SUE

Gary. They're twisting your words.

TV CUTS TO FOOTAGE OF CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY BY FRED WEIL

WEIL

(TV)

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

SUE

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

NEWSCASTER/TV (OVERSCENE)

In other news...

SUE

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

WEBB

They hacked it up. They edited Weil's testimony.

104 **OMIT** 104

105 **OMIT** 105

106 **EXT. BANQUE SWISSE - MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - DAY** 106

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

107 **INT. WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT. - BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN** 107

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

 WEBB
 (picks up)
 Hello?

 WEIL/PHONE
 Gary, it's Fred Weil.

INTERCUT

108 **INT. WEIL'S KITCHEN - PRE-DAWN** 108

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

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

 WEBB
 It's four a.m..

Big silent beat. The other shoe about to drop.

WEIL

I was you once, Gary. I started down this road, though 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)

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

WEBB

No.

WEIL

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

Out the window, the sky beginning to brighten.

WEIL (CONT'D)

They edited my testimony, Gary.

WEBB

I know.

WEIL

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

(then)

WEIL (CONT'D)

But this is why I called. I wanted to tell you something my father told me. He was an Air Force pilot, and when things got ugly for me he reminded me that you get the most flak when you're right over the target. That's when they empty all their guns into you.

(MORE)

WEIL (CONT'D)

When you're about to drop a bomb on
the Kremlin ... or in this case,
the Central Intelligence Agency.

They sit there listening for each other a moment.

WEIL (CONT'D)

Gary? You there?

WEBB

I'm here.

WEIL

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

WEBB

Thank you.

WEIL

You hang in there, Gary.

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

SUE

Are you okay?

GARY

I'm fine.

109

INT. MERCURY NEWS NEWSROOM, SAN JOSE - DAY

109

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

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

WEBB

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

CEPPOS

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

WEBB

About what?

CEPPOS
The CIA's response, for one.

WEBB
There isn't one.

CEPPOS
Any CIA sources?

WEBB
Operatives? Clerks? Spies? Who?

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

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

Webb picks up the Washington Post.

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

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

KRIM
Gary. Walter Zuckerman is a living
legend.

WEBB
--and thinks his job is to defend
the CIA. Did you know he *worked* for
the CIA as a media intern? He was
on their payroll!

CEPPOS
Let's calm down, people.

WEBB
(gestures to the papers)
Reading these is like reading
Pravda circa 1953.

Webb looks around the room. The faces vaguely hostile.

WEBB (CONT'D)
What am I missing here?

ANNA *
The story scares people.

WEBB
It should.

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

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

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

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

WEBB
And what about *those* families? The ones who are drowning because of what those assholes did?
(he points out the window)
The entire legal system has been re-gamed to put those kids in jail for decades, for something a white kid in Jersey would get a wrist slap for.
(then)
No room in the lifeboat, is that it? An entire generation of inner city men is gone--

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

Anna is handed a note. *

WEBB
What is it?

ANNA
Dateline just cancelled their
segment on the story. *

110

INT. ANNA SIMONS'S OFFICE - MERC - SAN JOSE - CONTINUOUS

110

Webb follows Anna in. Neither sits. *

ANNA
Tomorrow the Post is going to say
you're an active part of Ricky
Ross's defense, that your
involvement verges on complicity.
That you and Ricky Ross are telling
this fairy tale together.
(Webb starts to laugh)
It's not funny. *

WEBB
C'mon, Anna. *

ANNA
We're fighting for our lives, Gary. *

WEBB
We drew blood. They'll say
anything.

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

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

ANNA
Yes I-- *

WEBB

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

(then)

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

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

*

111 INT./EXT. WEBB'S CAR/WEBB'S HOUSE - LIESEL CT., SACRAMENTO 1-1
NIGHT

Webb sits in his car. Unable to get out. Dials his cell--

WEBB

(into phone)
 It's Gary Webb.

KLINE/PHONE

Really? Oh. Okay.
 (long pause)
 Hello?

WEBB

What's going on, Rich? The only people you *have in your* 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.
 (silence)
 Hello?

KLINE/PHONE

I can't-- I can't talk to you.

WEBB

Why?

Pause. As if he's wondering himself. Then--

KLINE/WEBB
 I don't know. I'm sorry.
 (then hangs up)

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

Webb enters. Looks shell-shocked. Sue and the kids in the kitchen. Webb joins.

SUE
 How goes the war?

WEBB
 I'm not sure.

SUE
 What does that mean?

WEBB
 It means I'm not sure.

Beat. Sue stops, looks at him.

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

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

IAN
 Like what?

WEBB
 That it may not be true.

113 **EXT. SUBURB OUTSIDE CLEVELAND - DAY** 113

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

REPORTER

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

THE MAN

(frowns)
My wife did.

REPORTER

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

THE MAN

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

114

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

114

Sue carries a steaming cup of coffee into the living room, where Webb sits with Anna. *

ANNA *

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

Webb nods, stoic. Takes a breath.

WEBB

The story's tight.

ANNA *

It's not perfect.

WEBB

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

ANNA *

It's not the story now. This is about you. The Times gave us a courtesy call.

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

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.

ANNA

That's not a good idea. *

Sue's seeing something else on Anna's face. *

SUE

(firm)

Ian, go upstairs.

When the boy leaves:

SUE (CONT'D)

They found out about that woman.

Anna nods. Webb looks confused. *

ANNA

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

(beat)

Remember what I said about credibility?

WEBB

You can take any life and pull it apart, turn any hard-working good life into a murder mystery.

(beseeching)

What about everything else? What about the rest of me?

ANNA

There is no rest of you any more. *

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

115

Ian watches from the doorway as Anna gets into her car. Gary *
walks back up to the house. Stops in front of his son. They *
hold a long look. *

IAN *
(straight, undeterred) *
What happened in Cleveland? *

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

116 *

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

WEBB
There's no such thing as a little
mistake. One tiny tear in a
parachute means you plunge to the
earth. A pin-hole in a submarine
can crush and sink you. You turn
wrong, then you're lost, you turn
trying to get home, and sometimes
you just get more and more lost and
farther from home.

IAN
You sound like a writer. I'm asking
my father what happened in
Cleveland.

WEBB
I screwed up.

IAN
Who was it?

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

IAN
What was her name?

WEBB
Why does that matter?

IAN
It matters to me.

WEBB

Barbara.

IAN

Did you love her?

WEBB

No.

IAN

Did you love mom?

WEBB

I loved your mother. I love your mother.

(Ian confused)

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

IAN

For how long?

WEBB

A year.

IAN

Dad.

(then)

Which year?

WEBB

You were twelve.

Ian starts to cry.

WEBB (CONT'D)

I broke it off. You and your mother were -- are -- my entire life--

IAN

And then.

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

WEBB

She committed suicide.

IAN

(stunned)

That's really shitty.

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

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

WEBB
 We needed a new start.

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

WEBB
 Well, it's behind us now.

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

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

WEBB
 I understand.

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

Ian slips past her toward the house.

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

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

She stands there staring at Webb for a beat. She then walks
 away.

117 INT. MERCURY NEWS NEWSROOM, SAN JOSE - DAY 117

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

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

118 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MERCURY NEWS, SAN JOSE - DAY 118

Webb enters, eyes on Anna. She looks away-- *

WEBB

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

ANNA *

Just have a seat, Gary.

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

CEPPOS

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

WEBB

Anna, what's he talking about? *

She averts her eyes.

KRIM

We had Pete backtrack some of your
leads.

WEBB

Why the hell didn't you tell me?

CEPPOS

Everybody's on the line, Gary.

YARNOLD

We're out of our comfort zone.

WEBB

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

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

KRIM

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

(Webb waits)

Some of your sources have changed their stories.

WEBB

I'm sure they did.

KRIM

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

WEBB

Yeah, that's how they operate.

KRIM

"They"?

WEBB

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

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

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

WEBB

What? No.

(to Anna)

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

*

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

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

WEBB

Who is this guy?

CEPPOS

Outside counsel.

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

WEBB

Then as long as we're outside our comfort zone, let me remind you that the CIA doesn't just use people who work for the CIA. They use people who DO work for the CIA, Get the difference?

*
*
*
*

All seem embarrassed for Webb.

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

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

WEBB

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

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

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

WEBB

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

CEPPOS

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

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

WEBB

Call Norwin Meneses in Nicaragua.

CAREY

He said he never spoke to you.

Webb, stunned, drifts into his seat.

WEBB

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

ANNA

I know you were in Managua, Gary--

WEBB

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

CAREY

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

WEBB

Five hundred people saw me!

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

Can you prove it?

WEBB

You mean like did I get something from the prison *gift shop*?

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

Do you have any proof you were actually inside that prison?

WEBB

I bribed my way in.

CEPPOS

Oh great.

WEBB

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

(then)

What about my notes?

OUTSIDE COUNSEL

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

WEBB

Fuck you.

CEPPOS

Gary!

WEBB

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

ANNA

Calm down, Gary--

*

CAREY

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

WEBB

What about him?

CAREY

I can't find him.

CEPPOS

No one's heard from him.

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

*

WEBB

This is nuts.

(to the room)

The CIA can't take a piss without getting their dicks caught in their fly, but they are absolutely fantastic at this.

(getting it)

You all think I'm crazy. And a liar.

CEPPOS

Let's not make it personal.

WEBB

What's *not* personal about this?

CEPPOS

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

WEBB

Get out of it?

Then, from the top of the table:

YARNOLD

Gary, we're going to kill the story.

Long beat.

KRIM

There's a bigger picture. Open your eyes.

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

WEBB

My eyes are open. And you know what 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, and you become a newspaper that tells the truth - unless you don't feel like it.

*

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

WEBB (CONT'D)

(just)

Anna.

(nothing)

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

CEPPOS

(as if Webb hadn't spoken)

Gary. There's something else.

119

EXT. WEBB HOME - DAY

119

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

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

IAN

I mean, what the hell's in
Cupertino?

WEBB

The paper's bureau for losers.
Where I won't get in trouble.
(stage wink, making the
best of it)
Or so they think.

CHRISTINE

Maybe just don't go, daddy.

WEBB

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

Webb looks up at the house.

WEBB (CONT'D)

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

Webb's been avoiding Sue's face.

WEBB (CONT'D)

It was go to Siberia or resign.

SUE

You're not resigning.

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

SUE (CONT'D)

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

(then)

Letters. My love letters.

I put some of Christina's drawings
in there, too--

(then)

Make it a home. Don't give up.

WEBB

(tears up)

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

SUE
I know, Gary--

WEBB
I like working at my desk, hearing
you and the kids making noise up
stairs.

SUE
Maybe some time away is a good
thing.

Sue puts the box in his hands.

SUE (CONT'D)
You're gonna be fine. We're with
you. We're cheering you on.

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

Webb's TR-6 pulls into a motel parking lot. The pool area is empty. No one around. Christmas lights saggy and dim. Fake plastic reindeer drink from the pool.

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

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

WEBB
(drops his bags)
Wow. A VCR.

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

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

A123

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

A123

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

WEBB

(into phone)

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

(then)

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

(reaches for a notepad)

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

123

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - NIGHT

123

PAN THE WALLS

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

Webb on the bed. Has been on the phone. Dialing for dollars. A list of names before him. All but a few crossed out. He dials a number. Recording - *this phone line has been disconnected* - beep beep - and he hangs up. Dials another line, checks his notes. The line rings and rings.

*
*
*
*

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

124

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - ANOTHER NIGHT

124

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

A longer beat. Still nothing happens.

WEBB

I'm sorry.

SUE

About what?

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

SUE (CONT'D)

I thought it was horses.

WEBB

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

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

SUE

You didn't even open it.

WEBB

Open what?

SUE

Didn't even take us out of the box.

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

WEBB

(re: the story)

I need more time.

SUE

And then what?

WEBB

And then it's done.

Sue sits down on the bed.

SUE

And then what?

Long beat.

WEBB

I didn't choose what's happening.
I don't want to be here. In this
shit place.

*
*

SUE

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

WEBB

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

SUE

No.

A sweet smile. Then --

SUE (CONT'D)

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

She takes his hand.

SUE (CONT'D)

You were eighteen. We were
 eighteen.

WEBB

I remember.

SUE

You already knew what was true.
 (then)
 I just wanted you to want me as
 much as you want all of that.
 (re: the story, Coral)
 But I know it's never going to
 happen.

*
 *
 *

Stop. There it is.

SUE (CONT'D)

You are who you always were, Gary.
 No blame. No judgement. It's just a
 fact.
 (then)
 It's me who changed.

WEBB

What are you saying?

SUE
I don't know.

WEBB
Yes, you do.

Then:

SUE
You're right, I do.

She gets dressed.

125 **EXT. MOTEL - CUPERTINO - ANOTHER DAY** 125

Now Webb's motorcycle is parked next to his car. Webb is out there cleaning it. More Christmas stuff. Tinsel. *

126 **INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - DAY- CONTINUOUS** 126

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

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

On the TV -- news footage: the chyrons -- "*Crack Scandal in Watts*" -- "*CIA Director John Deutch grilled in town hall meeting*" -- scrolling over images of community rage. Tall thin white Deutch failing to choreograph a mass of African American Angelenos. *

Webb sits on the bed and watches. *

127 **INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - LATE NIGHT** 127

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

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

MAN
Don't turn on the light.

Webb stops. He tries to get a better look at the man. There's barely enough light in the room to make him out. He's very TALL. Worn. Late 50's.

MAN (CONT'D)

I'm John Cullen.

(waits)

Do you know that name?

WEBB

No.

CULLEN

I didn't think so. Most of the time it's redacted. Usually, I don't exist.

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

WEBB

What do you want?

CULLEN

I'm here to give you something.

Cullen continues to study Webb's wall of notes, photos --

CULLEN (CONT'D)

What you found here, Gary, is a monster. So vast it seems impossible to understand. It's really very simple though. So simple a child could understand it.

He pulls up a chair next to Webb's bed. Sits.

CULLEN (CONT'D)

I was recruited by the Agency out of college.

Webb sits up in bed. Carefully. He knows what Cullen is.

CULLEN (CONT'D)

I knew Spanish and law and wanted to do good. I wanted to fight some evil empire. I went to Central America, made nice with radicals and slept with some of the pretty ones, and I turned in their names.
(pause)

CULLEN (CONT'D)

Then I started noticing that they were all disappearing. Permanently. The people we hunted, murdered - all they had was this deep desire to reform the government and have free elections.

*
*
*
*
*
*

WEBB

You have confirmation that these people actually died?

*
*

CULLEN

Instead of *sorta* died?

(beat)

After that, they asked me to work my way into a major drug cartel. Early Medellin. Back then the cartels were small. I solved their logistical issues. Getting supply into the United States. Paved the way, you might say, as the traffic grew.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

WEBB

So you left the Agency?

CULLEN

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

WEBB

But there's someone in Washington who knows what you do and is not stopping you from doing it. *

Cullen nods in the affirmative. *

CULLEN

(begins to get upset) *

It's all lies and corruption. *
 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

Your thing and my thing-- are they *
 connected? Are they the same? *

Cullen looks at him. A cocktail of annoyance and sympathy. *

CULLEN

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

(then the give)

Yes. They are the same.

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

CULLEN (CONT'D)

Danilo Blandon. Taken yesterday.

Webb takes out photos of Danilo Blandon -- tan and fit, country club whites -- and a GORGEOUS WHITE GIRL, 19, in front of a fancy house.

WEBB

Why are you showing me this?

CULLEN

Because you need to see it. That's him. And this--

(the shitty motel room)

Is you. Get out now. No one wants to hear your sad story.

WEBB

I can bring you in. Get you to go on record.

CULLEN

Sure, Gary.

(beat)

No.

WEBB

Then why are you here?

CULLEN

I suppose I'm confessing.

(then)

Who else am I going to talk to. You're the only one really listening.

128

EXT. CONDO - SAN JOSE - NEARLY MORNING

128

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

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

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

ANNA (O.S.)

Who is it?

*

WEBB

It's Gary.

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

ANNA *
Gary. It's five in the morning.

WEBB
You don't look happy to see me.

ANNA *
I'm in my pajamas.

WEBB
I found him.

ANNA *
Found who?

WEBB
The operative. The CIA--

ANNA *
Gary--

WEBB *
Anna! It's what you kept asking for! The one thing I didn't have. I can keep going now.
(waits; silence)
He was part of the operation --

ANNA *
Gary --

WEBB
If I can get him to go on record, he'll confirm everything.

Pause, then--

ANNA *
It's over.

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

ANNA

But we are.

(then)

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

WEBB

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

ANNA

I understand, Gar --

WEBB

(he keeps going)

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

ANNA

Okay.

WEBB

For you. Or somebody else--

ANNA

Okay.

WEBB

Okay.

(then)

Good night.

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

ANNA

'night, Gary-

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

129

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CUPERTINO - MID AFTERNOON

129

Webb is crashed out in bed. A half empty bottle of Maker's Mark to the side.

The phone is ringing. The machine picks up.

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

130

EXT. MOTEL - CUPERTINO - MID AFTERNOON

130

Later. Webb steps out for air. Lights a cigarette. Watches a
 few families in the pool area. He tips his face back to the
 sun. Catharsis? Relief? Grief? Which is it?

Opens his eyes. Now notices - the motel parking lot.

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

He runs into the parking lot. Looks around. Nothing. Fuck!

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

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

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

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

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

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

A131 **EXT. WEBB HOME - ANOTHER DAY**

A131 *

Webb drives up to the house. *

He stares up at his house for a beat. He tosses a Vicodin into his mouth, dry swallows. He exits the car, buttons his jacket and rings the doorbell. *

131

INT. WEBB HOME - MOMENTS LATER

131

Webb rings the bell. Christine and Eric answer. They let him in. *

CHRISTINE/ERIC *

Daddy!! *

WEBB *

Munchkins! *

ERIC *

(re: bandaged hand) *

What happened? *

WEBB *

It's just a scratch...it'll be okay. *

ERIC *

Are you ever coming home? *

WEBB *

I'm working on it. It's complicated. Your mom home? *

ERIC
Mom. Dad's here.

Sue comes out of her room in a gorgeous purple dress.

WEBB
Whoa! You look beautiful!

SUE
I look beautiful.

Eric and Christine leave.

SUE (CONT'D)
Come in. (then, re: hand) What's
this?

WEBB
It's a long story. Not interesting.

SUE
How've you been?

WEBB
Good. I've decided to keep writing
on my own without the paper.

SUE
You're resigning?

Webb's eyes show Sue how much he needs her at this moment. He
needs her encouragement.

SUE (CONT'D)
Maybe this is a good thing. Fresh
start. Make room for the next
thing. You're a great reporter.
(MORE)

SUE (CONT'D)
 (calling out to the
 babysitter)
 We'll be home by midnight.

*
 *
 *

They hear a motorcycle start up. Sue has a knowing look on her face.

*
 *

WEBB
 No way.

*

A132 **EXT. WEBB HOUSE - DAY - CONTINUOUS**

A132

*

Webb and Sue see Ian exiting the garage sitting on his finished and assembled motorcycle. He revs the engine.

*
 *

WEBB
 Holy shit! You did it! My man!

*
 *

IAN
 I'll follow you guys.

*
 *

Webb is beaming. Webb and Sue walk to the car, get in. Ian lines up behind them.

*
 *

132 **EXT. BALLROOM, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - LATER**

132

TIGHTEN on a placard: "AMERICAN SOCIETY OF JOURNALISTS: JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR." Cocktail crowd milling about.

Webb, Sue and Ian off to the side with the SOCIETY DIRECTOR.

SOCIETY DIRECTOR
 There's no point not being straight with you. The board wanted to take this away. But I fought for you, and not because I felt sorry for you. I believe you. And you were abandoned. And I'm ashamed for our profession. 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.

133 **INT. BATHROOM - RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - NIGHT** 133

Webb in a stall. Opens a prescription bottle. Vicodin. Webb winces at the pain in his hand. Throws back a pill. Dry swallow.

134 **INT. BALLROOM, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - NIGHT** 134

Webb winds his way forward through a packed house. 500 national reporters, editors, newscasters, TV producers.

And they're on their feet, wildly applauding. Webb grinning. Victory. Sue at the Mercury News table beaming with pride. Anna Simons and Jerry Ceppos toasting him. *

Webb takes a step up on-stage, blinks ... turns to his triumph, and we

CUT BACK TO

135 **INT. BALLROOM, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO - CONTINUOUS** 135

The real room. Only 100 people. Politely clapping.

At the Merc table, Anna, Ceppos, Krim, etc. staring at their food. *

On every face the expression of someone watching a car begin to spin out of control at 70 MPH. Someone call the cops.

Webb at the podium. Webb's eyes land on Sue. Her brave face.

Now Ian looking to Gary for a lifeline. Webb nods, Gonna be fine. Pulls out remarks. Clears his throat. About to start.

Then stops. It's like he now can't read. He tosses his notes away. The room excruciatingly silent. Sue staring. What are you doing? This isn't you.

WEBB

(ad libbing)

You know, my first story was about a dog that shoulda died but wouldn't. I was twenty-two. It was a stupid little feature, but I was proud of it, and I put it in a frame and hung it up, and believed I joined a secret guild of reporters. If there ever was a true believer, it was me.

Some in the audience are nodding.

WEBB (CONT'D)

My last story - I filed it just this morning - was about a police horse in Cupertino, California that died of constipation.

He gets a gust of relieved laughter.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Actually, that's not a joke.

(laughs at himself)

But start with a dog, end with a pile of horseshit. There's a kind of poetry to that, isn't there?

(then)

Well, that's bullshit--

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

WEBB (CONT'D)

(long pause; looks out at the audience; rising anger)

Look, I am not going to lie for you people. I have gotten people pissed at me over the years. But I was never fired, I never got any death threats -- none I took seriously -- and my editors never threw me under the bus.

(the discomfort in the room grows)

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

Now I see it's because I never wrote anything that really mattered. Mattered in a way that matters to lots and lots of people. Matters in a scary way.

(then)

I am not going to give you what you want. I am not going to take it back and beg for my job and wag my tail. I am not going to make you feel better.

He and Anna HOLD a look.

*

WEBB (CONT'D)

I thought my job was to tell the public the truth. The facts, pretty or not. And let the publishing of facts make a difference in how people look at things, at themselves, and at what they stand for.

Long silence.

WEBB (CONT'D)

But shame on me--

(rising anger now)

I know something I didn't know before. I now know there are stories that are too true to tell. Who made you the arbiters of what the world should and should not know? Who made any of us God?

Webb stares out at the Merc table. At Anna and Ceppos. Then over at the LA Times table -- Rich Kline twisting a napkin.

*

WEBB (CONT'D)

Thank you. This is the only thing I ever wanted to do. And for a while, for a long while, it was an honor. Truly.

Webb simply turns and leaves the stage. Tepid applause.

He heads for the Merc table, drops an envelope - the resignation letter - in front of Ceppos. And walks on, away from us, through the awkward silence. Through the doors--

136

INT. BALLROOM LOBBY, RITZ CARLTON - SAN FRANCISCO

136

--and stops. Standing alone in the middle of the lobby. Steps for the wall, reaches for it, and just drifts down to the floor. Sitting there on the floor in shock like some sort of accident victim.

After a long beat, the doors swing open. Ian steps out.

IAN

You okay?

They trade a look. Webb naked to the world, before his son.

WEBB

I'm not sure.

He tries not to cry.

IAN

I'm proud of you.

WEBB

Thanks, buddy.

Sue walks out from the main room. Out the doors. She sees Ian * and Gary. Some people follow her out from the room.

Webb walks over to her for a private moment.

WEBB (CONT'D)

I've done things I don't like. I became a guy I don't totally understand.

(pause)

But I never stopped loving you. Not once.

SUE

I know.

WEBB

I need some air.

SUE

Okay.

IAN

Dad! Don't go too far.

But Webb, lost in his own world, keeps going...

Some people come up to Sue. They say hello. She has one eye on them, and one on Gary as he pushes through the doors. FADE TO WHITE --

-- the white now BURNS to a hot core. We're staring into lights. Fluorescent. Screen burns out. Now--

137 **OMIT**

137

CUT TO:

138 **INT. NEWS FOOTAGE**

138

NEWS FOOTAGE OF THE MONICA LEWINSKY SCANDAL BREAKING ON TV NEWS CHANNELS ACROSS THE GLOBE -- CLINTON NEWS CONFERENCE, PICTURES OF LEWINSKY as--

BACK TO MORE LEWINSKY. ALL LEWINSKY ALL THE TIME -- talking head upon talking head, EXCEPT FOR:

FOOTAGE OF LOCAL COVERAGE near the end of the half-hour. Something about--

CIA DUMPS MASSIVE PILE OF OBSCURE DOCUMENTS revealing a complex role in the civil wars of Central America -- mistakes made -- apparently known drug traffickers were used, employed -- tons and tons of cocaine crossing American borders --

A FLURRY OF THIS -- AND LEWINSKY -- but LOST. Noise atop orchestrated layers of noise with no beginning or end until the "news" comes at us like nonsensical Tom & Jerry cartoon. Palp. Peripheral. Gone, as--

139 **EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY**

139

IAN NOW RIDES his motorcycle SCREAMING up rolling hills, god's country --

CRAWL

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

** The CIA waited two years, then, amidst the chaotic distraction of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, released without explanation a 400 pp.*

document admitting to all of Webb's accusations and beyond. Not one of the nation's major newspapers or networks gave the confession coverage.

** Shortly after, Gary Webb committed suicide, shooting himself in the head.*

** The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and New York Times stand by their stories on Webb, Dark Alliance, and the CIA-Cocaine connection to this day.*

140

EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY

140

Ian now climbing a long rise, beyond it sky -- he's cresting -
- summiting -- Beneath him now nothing but a lush
undulating sea of trees to the horizon --

FADE OUT