

The Immaculate Deception

An Original Screenplay

By

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FADE IN:

Title: "Los Angeles, 2035"

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM -- MORNING

SUSAN WEAVER, an attractive woman, 30ish, long hair tied back in a simple, austere ponytail, is multi-tasking, eating a bagel and drinking coffee as she works out on an exercise bike. She flicks through the cable news channels:

- Russia building up troops on its border with Kazakhstan
- Tension in the South China Sea between China and Japan
- Clashes between police and extremists in Atlanta
- Climate disasters around the world

SUSAN

What a shit show. I should just go back to bed.

Wearily, she changes the channel. She addresses her cat, curled up peacefully on the bed.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I envy you sometimes, Jinxie. Not a care in the world. If we weren't on the ground floor, I'd jump out the window right now.

The channel changes to one of the anodyne morning shows.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Ah, thank God for mindless drivel.

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM -- MORNING

Typical untidy, open plan newspaper office - big logo "LA Post", arrays of workstations, TV monitors lining a wall. Half of the workplaces are clearly no longer manned.

JACK FOSTER, 30ish, handsome Aussie photographer, camera around his neck, walks passed framed copies of "classic" tabloid front pages hanging on the walls - mostly celebrity-driven, exposed peccadilloes, how the mighty fall.

He sidles up to Susan and reads over shoulder.

JACK

Jeez, Susie. You know you're wasting your time with all that tree-hugging shit, right? Marty's never going to publish it.

SUSAN

What? Oh, hi, Jack. Climate change is a serious-

JACK

Susie, Susie. Look at the walls. Tits and ass. Now, if everyone's going topless BECAUSE of global warming, then you got a story. I'll even take the pix myself.

She puts her hand on her heart.

SUSAN

That's so noble of you, Jack.

JACK

(theatrically)

I thought so too. It's a far, far better thing that I do-

HARRIS

Susan! Get in here, willya?

They turn to see MARTY HARRIS, early 50s, go back into his glass-walled cell.

JACK

Remember: tits and ass.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Harris, tie at half mast, collar button undone, has a world-weary air about him. He mutes the TV on the wall.

HARRIS

Yada, yada, yada. I dunno why we gotta have elections. Don't change shit. Only watched 5 minutes and I already wanna blow my brains out. God help us all!

He sees Susan.

HARRIS

Ah, Lois Lane - got a job for ya.

Harris points to the TV screen.

HARRIS

Bill Walsh, God's cure for insomnia, is gonna grace our glorious state with his imperial presence next month. I want you to go to Florida and follow his campaign for a few days.

SUSAN

But he's, like, lower than herpes in the polls. Why bother? Can't we just get what we want from the agencies, cable TV, internet?

HARRIS

Do you WANT newspapers to die?

SUSAN

That's what we normally do.

HARRIS

That's beside the point. This is coming down from our beloved proprietor himself. No idea why, and frankly, I couldn't give a shit. Capiche?

INT. TAMPA COMMUNITY HALL -- EVENING

Title: "TAMPA, FLORIDA"

A virtually empty hall. Around the room are LINCOLN PARTY banners proclaiming "VOTE WALSH FOR A SAFER AMERICA" "SAVE DEMOCRACY, VOTE WALSH" "WALSH 2036".

On stage is BILL WALSH, an impressive figure, mid-fifties, trim, expensively tailored, with distinguished flecks of grey hair. He looks every inch the patrician he is.

WALSH

Friends, we cannot afford a repeat of the last election. Under this disastrous administration, we've done nothing but lurch blindly from one crisis to another, since day one. The world is a scary enough place at the best of times, but our paralysis has emboldened evil regimes to become far more aggressive. Just look at the news, if you don't believe me.

A HECKLER shouts out. Security immediately head towards him.

HECKLER

Fake News!

WALSH

There's always one. No, leave him be - maybe he'll learn something, for once in his life.

The Security men back off, but stay close.

WALSH

Our electoral system has failed us. No one else in the world has such a convoluted, fragmented, hodgepodge like we do. It is, quite frankly, undemocratic, and it invites meddling from bad faith actors, both domestic and foreign. This is not a new revelation. Thomas Jefferson himself called it a crisis waiting to happen.

Susan YAWNS. She is startled by her cell phone VIBRATING. She rushes to the back of the hall.

WALSH

Well, my friends, that crisis has now materialized. The system already creaked when we only had two parties, but now that there are four, we have a serious democratic deficit in our body politic, and the government has become totally dysfunctional - leading to instability at home, and greater danger overseas. So, what should we do about it?

His Campaign Manager, FRED BROWN, 40ish, edgy, alert, impatient, is standing to one side, scanning the sparse crowd. He motions to Walsh to liven it up.

WALSH

I propose a Constituent Assembly be formed with the limited mandate to study all election rules and regulations, federal and state...

BROWN

(to himself)

No, no, no, no. I said DON'T go into the weeds, for fuck's sake.

He shakes his head as he spots an old couple fast asleep.

BROWN

Riveting!

WALSH

... and to propose a new all-encompassing amendment designed to make the system more democratic, more representative, and more uniformly coherent.

He pauses and looks at the audience despondently. He SIGHS.

WALSH
 Or we could just revoke the
 Declaration of Independence and
 bring back the King.

No reaction from the audience.

WALSH
 (incredulously)
 Really? Nothing?

By now, Susan is standing at the back speaking softly on her phone.

SUSAN
 Mike, I'm sorry I'm missing it, but
 this is my job, okay?... I know it's
 a waste of time - he's dying on his
 feet here. What...? Look, I've got
 what I need. I'm catching the red
 eye tonight, so I'll be back in the
 morning. Okay?... Hey, that's not
 fair. It's not my..

She stares incredulously at her phone for a moment.

SUSAN
 Jesus, it's only a birthday!
 You're not SIX anymore.

LUCY KELLY, pretty, mid-20s, businesslike, overhears.

LUCY
 Not getting much support back home?
 Sorry, didn't mean to eavesdrop.

SUSAN
 Says I'm wasting my time following
 this loser around.

LUCY
 Really?

SUSAN
 Sorry, manners. Susan Weaver, LA
 Post.

They shake hands.

LUCY
 Lucy Kelly, Campaign Research
 Assistant.

SUSAN
 Oh, my God! I didn't mean-

LUCY
 Hey, forget it. Off the record?

SUSAN

Off the record. They're not really interested in this stuff anyway.

LUCY

You're right. We're getting nowhere fast. It's frustrating as hell.

SUSAN

Why do it then?

LUCY

Masochism, I guess. You've got to start somewhere in this business, get that first notch on the belt.

SUSAN

Why not find another horse to back?

LUCY

Huh! Not the first time I've heard that! You know, and I'm not just saying this because he's my guy, I really do believe he's the best candidate out there: honest, smart, experienced, genuine.

SUSAN

So, no chance then.

LUCY

(chuckling)

Exactly! How often do you find that package? Trouble is, he's just not-

SUSAN

Connecting? If you want my two cents worth, he looks like he's had a charisma by-pass. He *seems* a nice guy, but it's a bit like watching paint dry.

LUCY

You may be right - although I never said that, okay?

SUSAN

Not exactly a secret, though, is it? He's just another rich white guy who hasn't got the faintest idea how the real world works.

LUCY

You'd be surprised. He's what this country *needs*, but he's not what it *wants*. I'm supposed to come up with some miracle to save this show.

Susan grabs her things and heads for the door.

SUSAN

You could try sacrificing a goat to the gods. Nah, in your situation, you'd better go the whole nine yards and sacrifice a virgin. That would be my advice. Ciao.

INT. TAMPA COMMUNITY HALL -- LATER

Walsh and his keen young aides are grouped around a table of soft drinks and take-away food.

BROWN

So, whaddya think? We nearly had enough for a football team.

WALSH

Football or fussball?

BROWN

Glad you can see the funny side, Bill. You definitely won over the Royalists though.

LUCY

Maybe not the largest demographic, but certainly underrepresented.

WALSH

It's a bit soul-destroying, staring out at an empty hall every night.

BROWN

You've gotta come down to their level, Bill. I mean, going into the "Constituent Assembly"! What were you thinking? They haven't a fucking clue what you're talking about.

LUCY

You're coming across as remote and, what's worse, "intellectual" - the kiss of death in American politics.

BROWN

No one cares about this stuff. Our polling shows you out of touch with the great unwashed.

LUCY

You gotta stress your bread and butter policies more - health care, education, the econ-

BROWN

She's right. We get it: you're really passionate about making the world a safer place - and, seeing as that's where I live, I'm all for it too. All this stuff is great, but it ain't firing up the party faithful. You gotta dumb it down.

WALSH

You have a very low opinion of the American electorate, Fred.

BROWN

Years of experience.

WALSH

It's very easy to be cynical, dismissing voters as ignorant and stupid. I like to believe that, when the chips are down, the American people do the right thing.

BROWN

Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's all very Pollyanna, but you know the game: to have a shot at this, you gotta win the primaries first, which means: suck up, or bow out.

WALSH

(frustrated)

You're right.

BROWN

Always. Time to start kissing babies and eating pizza - but, please, with your fingers, okay?

EXT. TAMPA COMMUNITY HALL -- NIGHT

Walsh says good-night to his team, then gets into the back seat of his limousine. It is raining hard.

WALSH

The hotel, please, Jorge.

Walsh rubs his eyes, places a small cushion against the window, rests his head and dozes off.

INT. WALSH LIMO -- NIGHT

Jorge drives cautiously. Without warning, a van recklessly attempts to overtake on a bend. A truck coming in the opposite direction BLASTS its horn and flashes its lights.

Beads of sweat appear on Jorge's forehead. The van brakes and falls behind again.

JORGE

Concha tu madre!

Jorge is relieved. He loosens his tie and pulls out a handkerchief and wipes his face. He checks the rear-view mirror. Walsh is asleep.

Suddenly, the van pulls out again, but again there is oncoming traffic. The van can't fall back in time, so pulls in sharply, BEEPING its horn.

Instinctively, Jorge swerves away from the van, off the road, onto the sidewalk. He struggles to control the car, but it crashes through a barrier and falls over an embankment. It rolls a couple of times before coming to rest upside down.

EXT. TAMPA ROAD -- NIGHT

An ambulance brakes with a SCREECHING sound, and the crew rush out to help the victims.

INT. TAMPA HOSPITAL - ER -- NIGHT

Two hospital gurneys are rushed into the Emergency Room. Two teams get to work on the patients.

INT. TAMPA HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM -- NIGHT

Walsh's campaign team arrive with JANE WALSH, the candidate's wife. All look grey with worry, but there is a stoical, patrician air to Jane.

INT. TAMPA HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM -- NIGHT

They all stand up as the DOCTOR comes through the swing doors. Jane looks at the doctor, fearing the worst.

DOCTOR

It looks like Mr Perez, is going to be fine. Mr Walsh, I'm afraid,-

Jane GASPS. Brown catches her as she momentarily wobbles.

DOCTOR

- clearly wasn't wearing his seat belt. He got thrown around quite badly and has lost a lot of blood. He's still unconscious, but his vital signs are good. He was very fortunate an ambulance happened to be passing at that moment.

Jane lets out a SIGH of relief.

INT. LAX AIRPORT - ARRIVAL LOUNGE -- MORNING

Susan drinks a coffee. She looks up at a TV and sees a news item about Walsh's accident. Horror flashes across her face. She grabs her phone and switches it on. 17 MISSED CALLS!

SUSAN

Oh, shit! Shit! Shitty shit!

She abandons her coffee and rushes out.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Harris paces up and down in front of a cowed Susan.

HARRIS

Jesus, Susan. We were the only paper still following this guy, and we had to get the story from the agencies because...

(eyes rolling)

... it's your boyfriend's birthday! Are you fucking kidding me?!

SUSAN

But, Marty-

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM -- MORNING

Employees scuttle passed Harris' office as he berates Susan.

EXT./INT. LOS ANGELES -- VARIOUS DAYS

BEGIN MONTAGE

- Susan reports at a country fair, bored.

- Susan reports on a minor celebrity visiting a pet charity. A poodle pees on her.

- Susan feigns interest as she reports on a gardener with huge vegetables, hesitant to touch a dirty marrow.

END MONTAGE

EXT. WALSH HOME - GARDEN -- DAY

Walsh, lying on a beach chair, looks much better, with only slight bruising, and a scar above his eyebrow. His left arm is still in plaster. Jane and his campaign committee are sitting around. The housekeeper brings out refreshments.

WALSH
 (on the phone)
 Thank you, sir. Yes, I'll tell her.

He hangs up. He turns to Jane.

WALSH
 The President. Sends best wishes.

Jane smiles appreciatively.

BROWN
 Okay, nice - especially after
 you've been trashing him so much.

Lucy points to her phone. Walsh nods. She takes a picture.

LUCY
 It's good to show the troops you're
 making a full recovery.

BROWN
 Okay, boys and girls. Back to
 business. Your poll numbers are
 through the roof - you're at 47%
 now. We should've driven you off
 the road months ago.

WALSH
 Talk of silver linings! I don't
 want to get too optimistic, but
 would that be enough to win the
 Electoral College?

BROWN
 Who fucking knows?! The most
 ridiculous constitutional system
 ever devised. It turns the whole
 thing into a crap shoot.

LUCY
 Depends on the distribution. We'll
 have to do some detailed polling.

WALSH
 Thanks, Lucy.
 (wistfully)
 Fate's a strange mistress, that's
 for sure.

EXT. RALLIES -- DAY & NIGHT

BEGIN MONTAGE

A series of political rallies, much better attended. As Walsh
 addresses them, we also scan to his principle aides.

Jane sits with an uncomfortable perma-smile behind him. Brown, always on edge, looks increasingly satisfied. Lucy is in awe.

- Rally 1: Walsh, left arm still in a sling, walks onto the stage to a thunderous standing ovation. He is visibly moved.

- Rally 2: A large hall. Walsh is cheered avidly.

- Rally 3: Walsh presses the flesh, hugging and greeting.

END MONTAGE

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE -- AFTERNOON

Title: "Governor's Press Conference, Sacramento"

The room is packed. The GOVERNOR and Senator Walsh share the stage. Jack has set up his gear with the rest of the cameramen at the back of the hall.

GOVERNOR

... so, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to endorse my good friend, Bill Walsh - the next President of the United States!

A huge CHEER goes up. The reporters leap to their feet and start shouting out questions. Susan raises her hand and calls out, but, despite her determination, is lost in the melee.

EXT. PRESS CONFERENCE -- LATER

Senator Walsh leaves the building, and heads towards a waiting limousine. The exit is mobbed with reporters.

SUSAN

Senator Walsh, do you- ugh!

Susan is unceremoniously pushed out of the way. She recovers her poise to see Lucy standing by the exit.

SUSAN

Got your miracle, I see.

LUCY

We went for the goat AND a virgin.

SUSAN

Smart.

INT. AIRPLANE -- LATER

A very pensive Susan sits next to Jack. A gorgeous flight attendant is flirting with Jack as she serves.

SUSAN

What a cock up! First time Marty lets me back on the team, and we coulda got all that from cable TV.

JACK

No worries, Susie. You'll patch something together.

SUSAN

This guy Walsh is the kiss of death for me. It's unbelievable.

Jack drags his gaze reluctantly away from the flight attendant. He looks at her thoughtfully for a moment.

JACK

You want my opinion?

SUSAN

Do I have a choice?

JACK

You gotta hustle more. This is the good ol' U.S. of A, the land of opportunity - for those with sharp elbows. The farther the white man got from Europe, the less polished he became.

SUSAN

Aren't you Australian?!

JACK

There you go - proves my point.

SPEEDED UP FILM OF NATURE TRANSITIONING FROM SUMMER TO WINTER

INT. WALSH HOME - LIVING-ROOM -- CHRISTMAS MORNING

It's a scene from a Ralph Lauren Catalogue, as American as apple pie. Christmas carols are playing in the background. The children are sitting on the floor by the Xmas tree, opening their presents. Walsh & Jane are sitting on one sofa, his parents on the other.

BROWN (O.S.)

Okay, that's great. Now one with everyone by the tree.

As the family move to the tree, we see the other side of the room is full of press photographers and TV cameramen. As she gets into position, Jane whispers to her husband.

JANE

We don't even get Christmas day off, Bill?

Walsh ignores the question and continues smiling. He picks up 6 year-old MARK, the youngest child. As he does so, there is a crescendo of camera CLICKS.

BROWN (O.S.)

Perfect!

INT. SUSAN'S FATHER'S HOME - XMAS MORNING

The doorbell RINGS. The dog, Gandalf, starts BARKING. Susan's FATHER, late 60s, somewhat frail, opens the door. He speaks with a strong educated British accent. Susan nearly drops a small parcel when the dog leaps at her.

FATHER

(sternly)

Gandalf!

The dog calms down immediately, and nudges Susan who bends down and pets him.

SUSAN

Merry Christmas, Dad!

Susan gives him a big hug and a kiss, and moves into the house. Her father checks outside.

FATHER

Merry Christmas, Sweetie. Where's-?

SUSAN

Dad, I told you. We broke up.

She looks at him a little worried.

FATHER

Oh, yes, that's right, you did.

Perhaps it's for the best. He was...

Father catches Susan rolling her eyes.

FATHER

Never mind. Sherry?

He smiles, and leads her into the living-room. It is an academic's room - worthy tomes from floor to ceiling, and on virtually every surface. There is a small token Christmas tree in the corner, with unopened presents under it.

SUSAN

How're you feeling these days, Dad?

FATHER

Still breathing, which, I am assured, is a good sign.

INT. SUSAN'S FATHER'S HOME - LATER

The coffee table bears the remains of a Xmas spread, a bottle of sherry and two empty glasses. The muted TV in the corner shows Walsh's family having their Christmas.

FATHER

How's the job coming along, Susan?

SUSAN

(a little embarrassed)

Let's just say it's on hiatus.

(points to the TV)

Walsh, he's the front runner now.

Did you know that?

FATHER

I'm afraid I really don't pay much attention to such matters.

SUSAN

If only I hadn't blown it when-

FATHER

It's such a waste of your talents, my dear. You could be lecturing at UCLA, but-

SUSAN

Please, Dad, not again. I really couldn't face that life. Besides...

(unconvincingly)

I like my job. I know it's only a tabloid paper, but everyone's gotta start somewhere. One day, you'll be proud of me.

FATHER

(reassuringly)

I am proud, Sweetie.

He squeezes her hand. She feels like a little girl.

SPEEDED UP FILM OF NATURE TRANSITIONING FROM WINTER TO SPRING

INT. WALSH CAMPAIGN HQ, CONNECTICUT - MORNING

There are daffodils in vases and children's Easter cards pinned to the board. The Campaign Committee, tired but confident, is sitting around a conference table with Walsh. There is a buzz of excitement - they can smell victory. Brown points to a screen showing the latest Candidate Debate.

BROWN

Great performance last night, Bill. You looked far and away the most presidential.

LUCY

You just passed 5 million followers, and we collected another million dollars overnight.

WALSH

Great. Thanks everybody. YOU made this possible. I guess we'd better start thinking about VP candidates.

SPEEDED UP FILM OF NATURE TRANSITIONING FROM SPRING TO SUMMER

INT. LINCOLN PARTY CONVENTION -- EVENING

Huge hall, festooned with banners, but the predominant one is clearly "WALSH/RODRIGUEZ 2036". A giant board tallies the votes. Walsh/Rodriguez lead 2:1 against Beatty/Miller.

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Susan slouches on the sofa with a beer and popcorn, watching the convention. She strokes her cat.

SUSAN

Who would have thought it? A miracle, indeed.

INT. LINCOLN PARTY CONVENTION -- MOMENTS LATER

Walsh is on stage with Jane, acknowledging the CHEERS of the crowd. He beckons to a Hispanic couple in the wings, LYDIA RODRIGUEZ and her husband. Walsh and Lydia link hands and raise their arms. Huge ROAR from the crowd.

RODRIGUEZ

This is like a dream, Bill.

WALSH

You ain't seen nothing yet, Lydia. Next January, the White House!

RODRIGUEZ

Dios mio, I believe you. It's like a fairy tale, but I believe you.

WALSH

Now, let's celebrate!

They leave the stage. Walsh turns to his wife. He looks her in the eyes with a smile, then hugs and kisses her.

WALSH

Thanks, Jane. Thanks for everything.

INT. PRESSROOM, L.A. POST -- DAY

Harris muses aloud while Susan toils at her computer. Copies of the day's paper are lying around. The headline proclaims: "It's Walsh versus Pullman".

HARRIS

Dunno what we're gonna write about, the next few months. Walsh's got this in the bag - he's gonna walk all over Pullman. Forget the other two, they're just white noise.

(yawns)

Besides, it's all just one big fucking joke. Who doesn't think the Electoral College is gonna fuck us like last time, leaving it to those scumbags in Congress to decide...? Don't know why we bother.

Susan turns her monitor towards Harris.

SUSAN

Did you know about Walsh's Mafia connection?

HARRIS

What!?!?

SUSAN

Look at this. It's from 20-odd years ago. Walsh took campaign contributions from the mob. I knew he was too good to be true - just another sleaze-ball, like you said.

HARRIS

Shocker!

Harris takes a cursory glance at the screen.

SUSAN

Why's no one talking about this?

HARRIS

They're all the same, except maybe Walsh is the skinniest kid at Fat Camp. Do you really think Pullman's any better? Hmm. It's not much, but if you can put some meat on those bones...

INT. L.A. HOSPITAL - VERONIKA'S ROOM -- DAY

A very tired VERONIKA MARSDEN, attractive, late 20s, is breast-feeding her baby. While a NURSE attends to her, the hospital REGISTRAR is doing the paper work.

REGISTRAR

Okay, got that. And the father?

Veronika speaks softly, almost innocently.

VERONIKA

William Walsh.

REGISTRAR

(writing)

W-i-l-l-i-a-m W-a-l-s-h. Address?

VERONIKA

Washington. Washington DC.

REGISTRAR

I need more than that, dear.

VERONIKA

Ah. I guess the Senate, Capitol Hill. Senator William Walsh.

She points to the news broadcast on the muted TV on the wall. Taken aback, the registrar and nurse look at one another.

REGISTRAR

Are you sure?

VERONIKA

I know the father of my baby.

The registrar hesitates momentarily, then resumes writing.

REGISTRAR

O-k-a-y.

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM -- DAY

Susan answers her RINGING cellphone.

SUSAN

Yes... Speaking. What!? Senator Walsh? Are you sure?... Who is this?... Hello? Hello?

Annoyed, she puts the phone down and gets back to work.

SUSAN

Some assholes have a weird sense of humor.

The phone RINGS again.

SUSAN

Yes. Who is this? How do you...? Hello? Hello?

She checks the phone screen. No Caller ID. She sits pensively for a moment, then grabs her bag and rushes for the exit.

INT. L.A. HOSPITAL - VERONIKA'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Susan KNOCKS and enters.

SUSAN
 Sorry to bother you, Miss...
 (reading the charts)
 Marsden. Is now a good time?

GREG, 50ish, sits by the bed. He projects confidence and mystery, being of indeterminate origin.

GREG
 I gotta go, Nika. Later.

He nods politely at Susan and leaves.

VERONIKA
 Sorry, who are you? You're not a nurse.

SUSAN
 Susan Weaver. From The Post.

VERONIKA
 The Post? You're here fast.

SUSAN
 You don't seem surprised to see me.

VERONIKA
 It was bound to get out. There are no secrets in this world.

INT. L.A. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR -- CONTINUOUS

Greg looks up and down the corridor outside Veronika's room. He speed-dials a number on his phone and holds it to his ear.

GREG
 She's here. Go ahead.

INT. L.A. HOSPITAL - VERONIKA'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Veronika stops feeding the baby and starts to burp her.

SUSAN
 What a beautiful baby!

VERONIKA
 Thank you.

SUSAN
What's her name?

VERONIKA
Alexandra.

SUSAN
Was that the baby's father who left
just now?

VERONIKA
Come on, Miss Weaver, don't treat
me like a fool. He's a friend.
Senator Walsh is her father.

Susan points to the TV.

SUSAN
THAT Senator Walsh?

VERONIKA
Is there another?

SUSAN
Can you prove it?

VERONIKA
Of course I can.

Susan pulls up a chair, sets her phone to record and places
it on the bed.

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

No lights are on. The cat SHRIEKS. Two masked BURGLARS come
from the back into the living-room. One of them pulls out an
iPad. There are several windows with CCTV footage of the
apartment. A cellphone VIBRATES. The other one checks it.

BURGLAR 1
She's on her way back.

They grab everything and head for the patio door, taking one
last careful look before closing it behind them. It CLICKS.

EXT. L.A. HOSPITAL CAR PARK -- LATER

Susan is sitting in her car. She thumps the steering wheel
with excitement, accidentally setting off the HORN.

SUSAN
HOLY SHIT! H-O-L-Y S-H-I-T!

She WHOOPS with joy.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- EVENING

Harris is on the phone as Susan paces up and down.

HARRIS

Yessir... Yessir. Publish and be damned it is, sir.

He puts the phone down, in a semi-daze.

HARRIS

He likes it. No, he LOVES it.

SUSAN

Great. I'll try again to get Walsh for comment.

HARRIS

No time. He wants it up NOW, and in tomorrow's paper. How sure are you this story holds water?

SUSAN

She didn't give me much, but I checked out what I could. He was definitely here in L.A. for a fund raiser at the time the baby was conceived. It's a bit thin. Give me a bit more time and I'll...

HARRIS

And she's locked in?

SUSAN

Of course. \$10k now. \$100k if she meets certain requirements.

HARRIS

That's all?!

SUSAN

My opening offer and she took it. What she really wants is for him to acknowledge the kid is his.

HARRIS

Ah, the jilted lover! Hell hath no fury, and all that. And there was me dreading this election cycle!

SUSAN

Marty, this is HUGE. Let me check-

HARRIS

Stop worrying. Reality check: if WE don't do it NOW, it's gonna be all over the internet in a few hours anyway. He who hesitates is lost.

SUSAN

I'll get Legal Department to make sure we cover our asses with all the usual "allegedly"s.

HARRIS

Now you get it. This is manna from Heaven, Susan. But the best bit: we're gonna beat those supercilious bastards at The Times.

He punches the air victoriously.

SUSAN

If not out of courtesy, at least professionally, shouldn't we ask Walsh for-?

HARRIS

Wise up, Susan. He's a politico! He's never gonna admit it. You called his campaign, they didn't answer. You did your best. "Senator Walsh and his staff did not respond to requests for comment." Done.

EXT. SUSAN'S FATHER'S HOME - EVENING

Susan's Father opens the door to Susan.

SUSAN

Great news, dad. I've got the Front Page story in tomorrow's paper.

FATHER

Something uplifting, I hope - not the usual sordid gossip.

Susan visibly deflates as she follows him into the house.

INT. TV STUDIO -- MORNING

Breakfast TV. Two presenters (WENDY and JEFF), plastic smiles on full beam, are sitting on a sofa, talking to camera. A clock on the wall shows 7:15. A studio FLOOR MANAGER is fussing around offscreen.

Walsh is standing in the wings with Lucy, waiting to go on. He is very relaxed. He is in a good mood.

FLOOR MANAGER

(in a whisper)
One minute, Senator.

Walsh follows the Floor Manager to the other sofa.

Lucy spots Brown hurrying towards her, waving his phone. He looks really haggard.

LUCY

Jesus, Fred. You look like death warmed up. You all right?

BROWN

(puffing)

Why don't any of you answer your goddamn phones, for fuck's sake?

LUCY

Battery's dead. It never stopped ringing all night.

BROWN

He can't go on.

LUCY

What!?

BROWN

No time to explain. Senator, might I have a word?

FLOOR MANAGER

Sorry, gonna have to ask you to keep quiet. We're on in five.

Walsh's microphone is being attached, and last minute make-up applied. He sees Brown gesturing for him to leave. For a moment, he looks confused, then regains his composure.

WENDY

(to camera)

Welcome back. We are honored today to welcome the Lincoln Party nominee for President, Senator Walsh. Congratulations, sir.

WALSH

Thank you, guys. Always a pleasure.

INT. L.A. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Jane watches her husband on TV as she breakfasts. There is a pile of newspapers on the bed beside her. On top is the L.A. Times, with a cover photo of a jubilant Walsh at the Convention. She looks at the picture and smiles proudly.

INT. TV STUDIO -- CONTINUOUS

WENDY

I was wondering if you have any comment on the cover story in this morning's L.A. Post?

Brown slumps off-screen. He hands his phone to Lucy.

WALSH

What story's that, Wendy? I've just come straight from the airport.

INT. L.A. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Jane is curious - she looks for the L.A. Post in the pile.

INT. TV STUDIO -- CONTINUOUS

JEFF

This one, Senator.

He holds it up. The headline reads:

"Walsh has secret love child"

WALSH

What!?! Me!?! Are you kidding me?

Lucy, totally stunned, leans on the wall for support.

INT. L.A. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

At the same moment, Jane sees the same headline. She nearly chokes. She reels from the news.

INT. TV STUDIO -- CONTINUOUS

Walsh looks for Brown in the wings. An incensed Brown is making a "cut" sign, and motioning for him to leave.

WENDY

It says here, Veronika Marsden gave birth last night in an L.A. hospital to a baby girl, Alexandra-

INT. L.A. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Jane sits bolt upright, her undivided attention on the TV.

WALSH (O.S.)

So? I don't know anyone called Veronika Marsden.

INT. TV STUDIO -- CONTINUOUS

JEFF

She says the baby's yours.

Walsh looks dumbfounded.

WALSH

That's rubbish. I've never even met the woman. It must be another Bill Walsh.

INT. L.A. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Jane starts to feel and look nauseous.

WENDY (O.S.)

It says here, she's quite specific: Senator Walsh is the father. Are there any other senators called Walsh?

INT. TV STUDIO -- CONTINUOUS

WALSH

You know damn well there aren't.

Walsh is becoming angry.

WALSH

This is a smear. Anyone could make up this... this... nonsense to derail my campaign. I have never met this woman in my life. I certainly never had a relationship with her - or anyone else, for that matter. I love my wife. I'm not going to stay here and take part in your public lynching. This is total crap!

He pulls off the microphone and storms out.

JEFF

Our apologies for the language there, viewers, but, as you know, this is a live show. I think this story's not finished yet. What do you think, Wendy?

They SNIGGER offscreen as the camera cuts to Walsh storming out of the studio.

WENDY (O.S.)

I agree, Jeff. It's certainly got legs!

INT. L.A. HOTEL ROOM -- LATER

Jane has clearly been crying, but is now composed.

WALSH

I'm telling you, Jane, I never even heard of this woman until today. I would never-

JANE

(coldly)

That doesn't matter right now, Bill. Just get on top of this and make it go away.

WALSH

That doesn't exactly sound like you believe me, Jane. Listen very carefully: I... DO... NOT... KNOW... THIS... WOMAN.

He puts his arms around her, and tries to pull her towards him. She pulls away.

JANE

I'm sorry, Bill. All the stress of the last few months, and now this. It's just too much. Don't ask me to play The Good Wife. You take care of this; I've gotta figure out how to break this to the kids - it'll be all over their social media.

Walsh wipes a tear from his eyes. He looks exhausted.

INT. WALSH CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN HQ -- LATER

WALSH

Couldn't someone warn me this was in the paper?

BROWN

It was shitty timing, Bill, sorry.

Walsh looks around at his sheepish, and very tired, crew.

WALSH

Okay. We are where we are. Let me say, absolutely categorically, today's the first time I ever heard of this woman.

The team look at one another. They are like rabbits caught in the headlights. Brown takes Walsh aside.

BROWN

Look, Bill. I'm your campaign manager, not your priest. I couldn't give a shit what you do in your own time. Just tell me the truth, so I know what I'm dealing with here. Did you, or didn't you?

WALSH

Jesus, Fred. I'm telling the truth.

Brown looks him very closely in the eyes for a few moments. Walsh stares back unflinchingly.

BROWN

Okay. Okay.

He turns to the others and calls for their attention.

BROWN

Listen up, people. Bill says he didn't do it, and that's good enough for me. Anyone got a problem with that?
No. Good. Look, these Bimbo Eruptions are par for the course. We just gotta deal with it.

LUCY

Except this isn't your usual Bimbo Eruption, is it?

BROWN

What're you talking about?

LUCY

Usually, it's "he said, she said". No evidence. This time-

BROWN

This time, there's a fucking baby. Brilliant, Lucy.
(turning to Walsh)
You gotta demand a DNA test. That'll show confidence and innocence. She'll be toast.

WALSH

This is a gross invasion of privacy.

BROWN

For fuck's sake, Bill. You're a politician. You don't have privacy. Make up your mind fast. We gotta nip this in the bud.

He turns to Lucy.

BROWN

Lucy, you check this woman out.
Find out everything you can - where
she goes, who she fucks, even her
fucking star sign. Got that?

He turns back to Walsh.

BROWN

Meanwhile, you gotta keep as much
as possible to your schedule, but
we're gonna keep you as far away
from reporters as we can. We don't
wanna give this story more oxygen.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Harris is excitedly pacing his office. Susan enters. He gives
her an emphatic kiss on the forehead.

HARRIS

What a scoop! Everyone's talking
about it. Our fuckin' website
nearly crashed. First time ever.
(proudly)

Even the Editor of the L.A. fuckin'
Times called me personally this
morning! It just doesn't get much
better than that.

SUSAN

My dad bust my balls over this
story last night, but, to hell with
it - it IS a great story, isn't it?

HARRIS

You betcha! You know what we gotta
do now, right? We gotta milk this
puppy while we can.

SUSAN

Get this, Veronika told me this
morning that Walsh tried to force
her to have an abortion.

Harris looks up at the heavens.

HARRIS

Thank you, God - this is just
getting better and better.

MONTAGE

- Split screen: Susan and Lucy work away feverishly trying to
corroborate or demolish the story, on computer and phone, and
interviewing people.

- Brown is barking orders at all and sundry in campaign headquarters.
- There is a pall of gloom over the Walsh household, with discernible frostiness between Walsh and Jane.
- Veronika lies in her hospital bed, feeding the baby.
- The front of the hospital is besieged by the world's media, held back by a contingent of police.
- Susan pays Veronika's hospital bill.
- Susan carries Veronika's bag to a limo at the back door, while Veronika carries the baby.
- They are let into a smart safe house by a Norland NANNY.

INT. SAFE HOUSE -- DAY

Veronika puts the sleeping baby in a cot. The Nanny heads for the door.

NANNY

You sure you're going to be okay?

VERONIKA

Of course. We're running out of stuff so-

NANNY

Okay. I'll be back as soon as I can.

Veronika, stretching and flexing, goes to the window and watches her get in the car and leave. With great agility she cartwheels around the room, with the grace of a gymnast. As she comes down elegantly onto the sofa, she is startled by:

GREG (O.S.)

What are you doing?

With lightning speed, she expertly whips a gun out from under the sofa cushion and points it at the intruder.

She lowers it when she recognizes Greg. Her body language and voice are completely different. Now she looks and sounds strong and confident.

VERONIKA

Next time I'll shoot you.

GREG

I'll shoot you first. Don't do anything that attracts attention.

VERONIKA

(irritated)

I know that. I needed to blow off some cobwebs. It's very confining, all this demure mother shit.

GREG

It's going well. The story's everywhere. They're very happy with you.

VERONIKA

They should be. All anyone wants is the baby. And she couldn't be more adorable. Look at her.

Smiling, she points to the baby. He turns away, totally uninterested.

GREG

Stay focused, Nika. Don't screw up.

INT. WALSH CAMPAIGN HQ, CONNECTICUT -- MORNING

Walsh and Lucy sit around a conference table. Brown paces back and forth. He is very agitated.

WALSH

What've you got?

LUCY

English Literature major from Harvard - excellent grades - better than mine, in fact. Doing a post-grad at UCLA.

BROWN

Where does she live?

LUCY

Shares a house, mostly students. No evidence of a boyfriend.

Brown stops pacing and looks angrily at Lucy.

BROWN

I hope you're not telling me this is a virgin birth!

LUCY

No. Course not. But how am I supposed to know who she slept with nine months ago?

BROWN

A fuckin' private detective! Wake up!

WALSH

Hey, tone it down, Fred, okay?

BROWN

Tone it down? You're incredibly calm for someone whose whole career is rapidly going down the tubes. Have you seen the latest polls? In the three days since this blew up, your ratings have halved.

WALSH

The truth'll come out. It's got to. What do we know about the reporter?

Brown looks at the newspaper.

BROWN

Susan Weaver. She was that dormouse who followed us around for a while a year ago.

LUCY

As far as I can see, no political agenda. Career not really going anywhere. Got lucky here.

BROWN

You make your own luck in this world. Find out HOW she got the story. I mean, she was in the clinic within hours of the birth.

An INTERN comes in, looking at his iPhone.

INTERN

Sorry. You need to see something.

He takes the TV remote and changes the channel until..

TV ANNOUNCER

... and now Celeste Moreno, a cocktail waitress in Las Vegas, is claiming she and Bill Walsh also had an affair last year.

WALSH

WHAT!?!?

INT. TV STUDIO -- AFTERNOON

Veronika is being interviewed. She speaks very calmly and deliberately, as she gently rocks the baby in her arms. The presenter, MIRIAM, is very sympathetic.

MIRIAM

Tell me, Veronika, how're you doing, with all this media circus?

VERONIKA

I just want to be left alone to look after my baby.

MIRIAM

Well, it's a bit late for that now, isn't it, dear? Have you spoken with the father yet?

VERONIKA

No.

BEAT. Miriam waits for her to say more, but she doesn't.

MIRIAM

Right. Walsh was on Fox yesterday. He is adamant he is not the father.

Veronika starts to weep. Miriam, offscreen, looks delighted. This is great television.

MIRIAM

He's insisting on a DNA test.

CLOSE UP on the sleeping baby.

VERONIKA

Why's he doing this to our baby? I thought he was an honorable man.

CLOSE UP on Veronika. She cries. Miriam hands her a handkerchief. She is ecstatic. This is great.

INT. WALSH CAMPAIGN HQ, CONNECTICUT -- CONTINUOUS

Brown is sitting at a large table covered with newspapers. There are several TVs to the side, all muted except the one showing Veronika's interview.

BROWN

This is getting ridiculous. There are now half a dozen bimbo eruptions around the country. You've been a busy lad, Bill.

WALSH

I never-

BROWN

Don't waste your breath. You couldn't have been dipping the wick like that without one of us noticing.

(MORE)

BROWN (CONT'D)

Forget them - they're just white noise, a bunch of trash trying to make a few bucks bragging how slutty they are.

LUCY

Their mothers must be so proud.

BROWN

How the world's changed! Used to be, even a whiff of infidelity was enough to finish a career, but now, after MAGA, no one cares, no matter how sordid the circumstances.

LUCY

BUT, throw a baby into the mix, with pressure to abort, and the pearl-clutchers go into paroxysms!

BROWN

Exactly. We gotta concentrate on the real threat, on Veronika. She's fast turning you into the fucking AntiChrist. God, I hate babies - especially cute ones.

WALSH

What else can I do? We need the DNA test.

BROWN

Not enough. You gotta fight back. We need Jane to do a Hillary. You know? Stand by her man, and all that.

WALSH

Jesus.

BROWN

She does believe you, right?

Walsh looks at Brown.

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM -- EVENING

A bored Susan sits at her terminal scrolling through photo after photo of Walsh.

SUSAN

God, there are millions.

The CAMERA pans past her to a TV monitor in the background showing an interview with Walsh.

INTERCUT BETWEEN WALSH LIVING-ROOM AND CNN STUDIOS IN ATLANTA

INT. WALSH HOME - LIVING-ROOM -- EVENING

Jane Walsh is being interviewed via satellite by CNN's WOLF BLITZER. She looks tired, but is very poised and graceful.

WOLF BLITZER

These must be tough times, Jane.

JANE

I've known better. My husband's a good man, who's dedicated his life to this country. You never expect-

WOLF BLITZER

What people want to know is: is it true? Is he Alexandra's father?

JANE

Bill has sworn to me there is zero truth whatsoever in this farce. He's never even met her.

WOLF BLITZER

Do you believe him, Jane?

JANE

(slight hesitation)

Yes. Of course I believe him, Wolf. He's never lied to me. My husband is an HONORABLE man.

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Susan suddenly sits bolt upright, her face beaming.

SUSAN

Eureka!

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Harris is watching Wolf Blitzer. He mutes the TV as the commercials start. Susan rushes in.

SUSAN

What were you saying about a raise, Marty?

HARRIS

Was I drunk?

SUSAN

You're gonna love me for this. Look!

She throws a photo onto his desk. It is a picture of a campaign rally. Veronika is standing next to Walsh.

HARRIS

Fuck me!

SUSAN

Exactly. We've got him now!

HARRIS

You've changed your tune!

SUSAN

We've finally got independent evidence that puts them together - at the right time! Plus all these other women coming forward-

HARRIS

You know, of course, most of them are just media whores, desperate for their 15 minutes - and a couple of bucks?

SUSAN

Of course, but surely not ALL of them. No smoke without fire.

Harris looks at the photo more closely.

HARRIS

Doesn't look doctored. Get it checked anyway. Hmmm. Looks like a campaign fundraiser. Hardly a smoking gun, is it? He must have glad-handed thousands.

SUSAN

Are YOU getting cold feet now?

HARRIS

No. Of course not. Oh, that's interesting. Look who's standing behind her.

He passes the picture back to Susan. She looks puzzled.

HARRIS

That's Stephen Wrigley. Bigshot Progressive lobbyist in LA. Total asshole. Why's he at a Walsh rally?

SUSAN

No idea.

HARRIS

Okay, run the story, but be careful - pass everything through legal first - especially anything that touches Wrigley. He'll sue our asses for anything.

(MORE)

HARRIS (CONT'D)

Better still, just crop him out of the picture. Better safe than...

She is already half way out of the door.

HARRIS

Oh... and get more human interest shit, willya? Is she an orphan? Did her mother die of cancer? Any of that crap will do.

EXT. JACK'S CAR -- DAY

Jack drives by the safe house when he sees Veronika being picked up by a limo. She doesn't have the baby with her.

JACK

Huh! That's odd.

He turns the car around and follows at a discrete distance. At one major junction he tries to take some photos, but another vehicle gets in between.

He calls Susan on speed dial. He gets an ENGAGED SIGNAL.

The car stops by a park and Veronika gets out. The driver waits. Jack parks his car and shadows her discretely into the park.

EXT. PARK -- CONTINUOUS

Veronika sits down on a bench and starts reading a newspaper. Jack looks around puzzled. He tries Susan again on the phone. Again, engaged.

Everyone he sees suddenly seems suspicious. There seem to be several burly men in dark suits and sunglasses strategically positioned around the park. From his hidden vantage point, he takes a rapid succession of snapshots.

He notices another tall, blonde woman, with sunglasses, heading towards Veronika. She nods to one of the burly men. Jack feels panic in his gut.

JACK

Fuck! Are they gonna kill her?!

He looks around frantically. What can he do? He picks up a stick, looks at it, then the burly men, and throws it back on the ground. He has only one weapon. He puts his camera to his face and starts taking lots of photos.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

The woman sits on the bench behind Veronika and starts reading a newspaper.

Jack lowers his camera for a second, surprised, then zooms in on them. He can tell they are talking but can't make out what. His frustration shows.

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

He calls Susan again. This time she answers.

SUSAN (O.S.)
Hi, Jack. Sorry I missed-

JACK
(whispering)
Shhh. Just listen. No time to explain. Some really strange shit going down with Veronika in the park. It's like a fucking spy movie here. What's going on?

The other woman folds her paper and stands up.

JACK
Hang on, I think they're leaving.

Veronika gets up and goes round to the other woman.

SUSAN (O.S.)
Follow the guy. See where he goes.

The two women speak for a moment.

JACK
It's a she. Will do.

He hangs up. He takes more pictures.

The two women look around carefully, then kiss briefly but passionately on the lips.

JACK
Okay. Didn't see that coming.

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

Veronika heads back towards the limo that brought her. Jack tries to zoom in to get a better picture of the other woman, but it is hard to get a shot of her face.

JACK
She's good.

Suddenly, the flare from his lens is spotted by one of the men. He points towards where Jack is, and three of the big guys start to converge on him.

JACK
Oh, shit!

He runs awkwardly through the undergrowth, tripping over a tree root. Palpitating profusely, he leaps back to his feet and runs out of a side entrance to the park. He grabs the first taxi, pushing aside another passenger.

JACK

Sorry, mate.

(to the driver)

The nearest Mall. Fast.

As the taxi speeds away, he ducks down and sees the three big men coming out onto the street. They search all around.

EXT. L.A. POST CAR PARK -- DAY

Jack and Susan are in her car. She scrolls through his pictures on the camera's small screen.

SUSAN

Huh. What do you make of it?

JACK

Not a clue. But those gorillas looked like they meant business. I'm sure they saw me.

SUSAN

Secret Service? FBI?

JACK

How would I know?

SUSAN

But why? And who's the mysterious blonde?

JACK

What's Veronika up to?

SUSAN

Let's not say anything just yet - we don't wanna sound all grassy knoll crazy.

JACK

What about my car?

INT. SUSAN'S CAR -- DAY

Jack, now wearing sunglasses and a baseball cap, is driving the car by the park with Susan in the passenger seat. They drive past his car. A couple of the burly security men are visible in the park.

EXT. STREET -- CONTINUOUS

A block from the car, Susan gets out and walks nonchalantly back towards Jack's car. No one seems to be specifically watching the car. She calmly gets in and drives away. Jack watches the men in the park.

He SIGHS with relief when no one reacts to the car leaving.

INT. WALSH CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN HQ -- MORNING

Walsh and Brown look despondently at the newspaper. The picture of Walsh and Veronika together has been cropped to look even more incriminating. The headline reads: "LIAR!"

Underneath, in smaller letters, it reads:

"Senator Walsh says he's never met this woman!"

The body language of the team betrays greater unease.

INT. WALSH CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN HQ -- LATER

Walsh is giving a TV interview.

WALSH

This proves nothing. There are thousands of photos out there of me with other women - it doesn't make me the father of their children. A simple DNA test would settle this, once and for all. Why is Ms Marsden so reluctant to allow one? This is a shakedown, and it's distracting us all from the more serious issues facing the country today.

INTERVIEWER

Is this a conspiracy, in your eyes?

WALSH

What other explanation is there?

INTERVIEWER

Who would do such a thing and why?

WALSH

Where to start?! It certainly isn't hurting the other parties, is it?

INTERVIEWER

Are you suggesting-?

WALSH

I'm not suggesting anything.

INT. WALSH CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN HQ -- MOMENTS LATER

The interview is finished. The TV crew are packing up their equipment. Lucy and Brown are watching in the wings.

BROWN
How many today?

LUCY
4. That's 10 resignations so far.

BROWN
Here he comes. Don't mention it.

Walsh walks up to them.

WALSH
What do you think?

BROWN
Forget all that. She's just agreed to a DNA test!

WALSH
Thank God. Now we can finally put this nightmare behind us.

Brown and Lucy watch him leave with a new spring in his step.

LUCY
Something's not right here, Fred. Yea, he looks happy, but why would *she* agree to a DNA test if it's going to prove to the world she's a liar? I don't get it.

EXT. VERONIKA'S HOUSE -- EVENING

It is already starting to get dark. Susan rings the bell, as Jack joins her on the doorstep.

JACK
Sorry. Traffic.

A 25 year old STUDENT housemate opens the door.

SUSAN
Hi. Susan Weaver, L.A. Post. This is my photographer, Jack.

STUDENT
Veronika's not here.

SUSAN
Oh. We were supposed to meet her here. Do you mind if we come in and wait?

The Student hesitates. Susan heads into the house before he can answer. Jack follows.

JACK

You've been sharpening your elbows,
haven't you?

INT. VERONIKA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Susan presses speed dial on her phone.

SUSAN

Hi, Veronika. It's Susan. We're at
your house. Did you forget our
appointment? You know - the
background photos? What?

(turns to Jack)

She didn't get the message from the
office.

(back with Veronika)

Sorry about the confusion... What?...
Oh, that's great. See you soon.
What?... Okay.

(passes phone to student)

She wants to speak with you.

INT. COFFEE SHOP -- CONTINUOUS

Veronika sits at a corner table with the baby, opposite a
very SOMBER MAN in a dark suit. She is on the phone.

VERONIKA

I've no idea why they're there, but
keep them happy, okay? BE NICE. I'm
on my way.

Annoyed, she excuses herself and leaves. The man, looking
very stern, throws some money on the table and makes a call.

INT. VERONIKA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Susan and Jack move into the living room, followed by the
student. It has a weather-worn student feel about it.

STUDENT

Okay. She says wait here. She'll be
back shortly. Tea? Coffee?

JACK

That'd be great, mate. Whatever.

The student leaves.

JACK
Surprised she forget the
appointment.

SUSAN
There wasn't one. Just curious
after your park episode. Thought
we'd poke around a bit. Probably
nothing, but you never know.

JACK
Nice one.

SUSAN
Get loads of pictures of the place -
and all the inmates, if you can.

JACK
You got it!

Jack snaps random pictures as he inspects the bookshelves and
the table tops. Susan exits into the next room.

INT. VERONIKA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

One wall is covered with photos of Walsh and press cuttings.

SUSAN
(semi-whispering)
Hey, Jack, get in here.

Jack rushes in and stops dead in his tracks.

JACK
Wow! A shrine. This must be
Veronika's room.

He takes lots of pictures.

SUSAN
But where's the baby stuff? Every
mother gets loads of stuff before
the baby's born.

Susan goes through the contents of the desk. She picks up a
California driver's license. She shows it to Jack.

SUSAN
I saw this guy at the hospital with
Veronika.
(reading)
Greg Carter.

She opens a closet.

SUSAN
Men's clothes. This is HIS room.
Why's HE so into Walsh?

Susan takes a picture of the license with her phone.

JACK
This is weird shit.

They hear the front door open. Jack changes the setting on his camera and, in a sweep from left to right, takes a quick series of photos.

SUSAN
Let's get back.

They are startled when they bump into an out-of-breath Greg.

GREG
Who are you? Why're you in my room?

JACK
Sorry, mate. L.A. Post.

Greg notices Susan.

GREG
I remember you.

SUSAN
We're waiting for Veronika. We
thought this was her room.

JACK
(holding up camera)
Background color. You understand.

Greg looks at Jack's camera, pissed. They leave. Greg quickly scans the room to check everything is okay. He pulls a partially concealed manila folder from a shelf. It has a passport-size photo of Susan stapled to the cover. Worried, he pulls out his phone and makes a call.

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM -- LATER

Susan and Jack are studying the photos on a large screen. Susan scrolls through them rapidly.

SUSAN
Veronika's room. Nothing much of
interest there.

She stops at the picture of Greg's wall.

SUSAN
Now this is intriguing, to say the
least.

JACK

Looks like Greg was stalking him. Maybe he's helping Veronika shake down Walsh for a larger payout.

SUSAN

If the baby really is his, Walsh is super-rich - they'd have got far more if they'd kept quiet and dealt with him under the radar.

JACK

Good point. Maybe they're not that bright and didn't think it through.

SUSAN

Could be. But she's never mentioned wanting any money from him.

JACK

Really? How unAmerican!

SUSAN

Especially considering her obviously modest circumstances.

JACK

Maybe Greg's just got a thing for Veronika and hates Walsh with a passion for getting her pregnant. Who knows?

SUSAN

It's real creepy.

JACK

Whatever, I can't get my head around how big this thing is.

SUSAN

I know. We've changed the presidential campaign, Jack. Maybe even the whole course of history.

JACK

Isn't that why you went into journalism in the first place? To fight for the truth.

SUSAN

What!? On the L.A. Post!?

They both LAUGH.

JACK

Good point!

SUSAN

It's all happening so fast. I feel it's running out of control. We don't have time to-

JACK

Time is dead, Susie, what with the internet and 24 hour news channels.

SUSAN

I'm just so scared I'm gonna screw up. If this DNA test is negative-

JACK

You'll be road kill.

SUSAN

Thanks for sugar-coating it!

JACK

No worries, Susie. You're doing great, I don't care what they say.

SUSAN

What?!

JACK

Hey, relax! Just winding you up.

EXT. VERONIKA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Susan and Jack are picking up Veronika and the baby. Susan notices a black SUV with dark windows parked a block away. There are two men in the front.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

As they chatter idly in the car, Susan watches the SUV pulling out to follow them.

VERONIKA

Damn. I don't have enough diapers.

JACK

No worries. There's a Walgreens ahead. Susie?

Susan pulls into the car park. Jack goes into the store. The black SUV also pulls in, but no one gets out.

Jack emerges a few moments later with some diapers.

JACK

Right, let's get to the hospital.

Susan pulls out, watching the SUV as it follows them again.

INT. CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL -- DAY

Walsh, accompanied by wife and media, gives a DNA sample through a mouth swab. He is confident and happy.

INT. L.A. HOSPITAL -- DAY

A nurse takes a DNA sample from the baby's mouth as Veronika and the media watch on. Jack takes lots of pictures. Susan watches nervously from the wings. She keeps looking around for the guys from the SUV.

INT. WALSH HOME - KITCHEN -- EVENING

Jane is preparing a salad. Walsh enters, comes up behind her, and puts his arms around her.

WALSH

Thank God this nightmare will soon be over.

(kisses her neck)

Thanks, Jane, thanks for everything. I'm so sorry you had to go through this.

He kisses her again. She does not react or respond. She calmly continues to prepare the salad.

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT - OUTSIDE CORRIDOR -- EVENING

Susan and Jack arrive at her front door, just as her neighbor, NEIL, late 20s, turns up with his groceries.

NEIL

Hi, Suze. Everything okay?

SUSAN

Sure. Why?

NEIL

Lots of banging the other day.

SUSAN

Eh? Must have been upstairs.

Neil shrugs, gives a shy wave, and goes indoors.

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

Susan bolts the door behind Jack.

SUSAN

Are you sure they didn't follow us?

Jack laughs, despite himself.

JACK

Come on. They know where we live.
They know where EVERYONE lives.

SUSAN

Why're you so calm? We were
followed all day.

JACK

If they'd wanted to harm us, they
had plenty of opportunity.

SUSAN

I guess so.

JACK

Someone in the NSA's probably
overcompensating because he screwed
up. I mean, Veronika did fuck a
Senator without anybody noticing.
Anyway, I'd better get going.

SUSAN

Oh! I, er, got some food in.

JACK

Really? You shoulda said - I woulda
brought something. So, what great
culinary delight...? Oh.

He sees a microwave Pizza box on the table. Susan looks
embarrassed.

JACK

If I'd known, I'd have worn my tux.

The camera pulls back and the picture morphs into a CCTV
image on a monitor.

MONTAGE OF IMAGES

- Heavy security everywhere as lab technicians put the
samples through the various stages of the DNA tests.

- An invisible hand puts an envelope marked "Test Results"
into a large manila folder with Senator Walsh's name on it.

- Another hand puts an envelope marked "Test Results" into a
large manila folder with Alexandra's name on it.

END MONTAGE

INT. CNN TV STUDIOS IN ATLANTA, L.A. & N.Y. -- AFTERNOON

The presenter, CINDY TURNER, waits for the end of the commercial break.

CINDY

Welcome back. Breaking news, and a CNN exclusive. The result of the Walsh/Marsden baby DNA test is ready. Veronika Marsden is in our L.A. Studio. Hello, Veronika.

VERONIKA

Hello.

CINDY

And Bill Walsh is in our New York Studio. Hello, Senator. Still campaigning hard?

WALSH

Hi, Cindy. Sure thing. We've got an important election coming up.

CINDY

Okay. Now, as agreed by the two parties, the samples they submitted were tested locally and the results sent electronically to a lab here in Atlanta for independent analysis. Bob Kellaway is at the lab. Hello, Bob.

INT. LABORATORY -- CONTINUOUS

Reporter, BOB KELLAWAY, is holding a microphone in front of a white-coated scientist, DR GORDON LEE.

KELLAWAY

Hello, Cindy. I'm here with Doctor Gordon Lee who has conducted the final analysis of the samples. Are the tests completed, Doctor?

LEE

Yes, they are.

He draws the envelope from the manila folder.

INT. CNN TV STUDIOS IN L.A. -- CONTINUOUS

Veronika sits calmly and confidently. Susan is just off-camera looking very nervous.

INT. CNN TV STUDIOS IN N.Y. -- CONTINUOUS

Bill Walsh is also calm and confident.

INT. WALSH HOME - LIVING-ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Jane Walsh is watching TV, the stress clearly visible in her face and demeanor.

INT. WALSH CAMPAIGN HQ, CONNECTICUT -- CONTINUOUS

All work has stopped in Campaign HQ. For the first time, there is no clatter from telephone calls. Everyone is in front of the TV. Brown paces up and down. A very nervous Lydia Rodriguez is pacing with him.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Harris stands nervously glued to the screen in his office. He chews right through a pencil and throws it in the bin.

INT. LABORATORY -- CONTINUOUS

Lee opens the envelope and takes out a piece of paper. He relishes the suspense.

KELLAWAY

Before you read the result, Dr Lee, maybe you can tell us how accurate these tests are.

QUICK REACTION SHOTS of

- Brown cursing with frustration... then Harris.
- Jane shaking her head in disbelief.

INT. LABORATORY -- CONTINUOUS

LEE

Extremely accurate, Bob. These tests can tell us if you and I had the same ancestor five hundred years ago, so the chances of error are infinitesimal.

KELLAWAY

Okay. So, now we reach the moment the nation's been waiting for. Is Senator Walsh the father of baby Alexandra or not? Go ahead, Doctor.

The screen splits to show Veronika, Susan, Walsh, Jane, Brown, Lucy, Rodriguez and Harris in separate boxes around the good doctor as he speaks. Veronika and Walsh are relatively calm, but the tension is beginning to tell - the others are much more nervous.

LEE

Well, Bob, after careful comparison of the baby's DNA and genetic profile with that of Senator Walsh, we are unanimously of the opinion that Senator Walsh...

Rather redundantly, he looks down at the paper.

LEE

... IS the father of Alexandra Marsden.

The screens react immediately. Walsh is totally stunned and shocked. Veronika allows herself a self-satisfied smile.

Brown is furious and rants to himself. Lucy is crest-fallen. Rodriguez slumps, disappointment written all over her face.

Harris is relieved, then punches the air in triumph.

Susan wilts with relief, then, in her excitement, gives Jack a big kiss. For a fleeting moment she looks embarrassed, then continues celebrating.

Jane is stunned. Her box expands to fill the whole screen. She collapses, weeping.

INT. WALSH HOME - LIVING-ROOM -- NIGHT

Walsh is pacing nervously. Jane stands still, tearful, but controlled. Her eyes are swollen from crying.

WALSH

I'm telling you I'm not the father. I can't be. It's impossible.

JANE

What? You used a condom? I hope to God you did! Do I need to get tested?

She shudders at the thought.

WALSH

No. No. It can't be. I've never even spoken with her, let alone-

Jane shakes her head in despair.

JANE

You've lied to me, your family,
your friends, and the millions who
believed in your campaign. For
what? A cheap piece of ass!

WALSH

Jane, listen to me-

JANE

Don't you "Jane" me.

Walsh throws up his hands in exasperation.

WALSH

I need YOU to believe me, more than
anyone else in the world.

He tries to put his arms around her. She recoils. She stares
him right in the eye.

JANE

Don't you touch me, you... you...
I don't know what you are anymore.

Reeling, she steadies herself on the furniture.

JANE

Get out of this house... NOW. You
hear me?

Stunned, he hesitates, before leaving, looking diminished and
dejected. Jane's composure cracks.

INT. WALSH HOME - HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

The three children are sitting on the stairs, their heads in
their hands. They have all been crying.

Walsh stops and tries to put on a brave face. ELIZABETH, the
15-year old daughter, looks up at him with a mixture of anger
and hatred. She breaks out into tears and runs upstairs.

ELIZABETH

How could you?

The two boys look bewildered. They look at him distrustfully.

WALSH

I'm sorry, boys. I don't know
what's going on. I love you all. I
love your mommy. I wouldn't do
anything to hurt you guys, I swear.

He turns to the eldest boy, Nathan, a gangly 12-year old.
They are all choking back tears.

WALSH

Nathan, I need you to look after
your mommy while I sort this out.

Mark, 6 years old, runs up and hugs his father.

MARK

Are we still gonna go in the
helicopter, Daddy?

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- LATER

A very bedraggled Walsh is sitting slumped on the side of the bed. His eyes are very red and have clearly been shedding tears. He rests his head in his hands. His phone rings.

WALSH

Yea, Lydia, I know. We'll talk
tomorrow.

The camera lingers on him for a moment. He is a broken man.

INT. SUSAN'S FATHER'S HOME - EVENING

Father opens the door and Susan rushes in exuberantly, kisses him on the cheek, and heads for the living-room. Her father looks more frail. Gandalf finds Susan's excitement infectious. She pets him wildly for a moment.

SUSAN

Did you see the news, Dad? That's
MY story. I've done it.

FATHER

At a price, though.

SUSAN

What?!

FATHER

Your story cost a man his family
and career - a man you once had a
high regard for.

SUSAN

That was before all this came out.

FATHER

Does it really matter, my dear, if
he had an affair? Is the next guy
going to be any better? Jimmy
Carter was a virtual saint, by all
accounts, but look at his
presidency.

SUSAN

The public has a right to know.

FATHER

I'm sorry, Susan, in my humble opinion it is none of their damn business. This whole sordid spectacle is just bread and circuses for the masses.

Susan is totally deflated and speechless.

FATHER

Actually, I was going to call you. Could you take care of Gandalf for a few days?

SUSAN

Sure. Off on your travels again?

FATHER

Going into hospital tomorrow for some tests. Not been the same since that last trip to India.

SUSAN

Jesus, Dad, why didn't you say? Are you okay? I'll take you in.

FATHER

Don't fuss, Susan. Nothing to worry about. It's really just routine.

INT. WALSH CAMPAIGN HQ, CONNECTICUT -- MORNING

Walsh stands in front of his dejected volunteers. There are only half a dozen left. He looks tired and drawn, but unbowed. He has regained an uneasy composure.

WALSH

I know how you all must feel... let down. But, for what it's worth, I have to say this. I HAVE been telling you the truth.

There is a universal look of disbelief.

WALSH

I know. I know. It doesn't look good, and I can't blame you for not believing me, for feeling betrayed. I've got no idea how this was done, but it's brilliant.

BROWN

Get real, Bill. It's over. You screwed up... literally!

WALSH

Fred. We've known each other for years. Have you ever seen me fooling around? Have I even flirted with anyone besides Jane? Well, Fred?

BROWN

I guess not. Doesn't prove you didn't.

Walsh moves up close to Brown.

WALSH

I'm telling you I did not have sex with that woman.

LUCY

(sotto voce)

That sounds familiar!

WALSH

I heard that, Lucy. Look me straight in the eye. I'm telling you: I do not know that woman.

BROWN

We all wanna believe you, Bill, but how? What happened here? And, why?

WALSH

I dunno. I have no, if you'll excuse my French, fucking clue. But believe me: I've been set up. With all we've been through this last year, do you think I'd chuck it away for a few minutes with some bimbo? Give me some credit!

They look at each other uneasily.

WALSH

Believe me, I can understand how you feel. You all know me to be a God-fearing man.

(raises his right hand)

Well, I swear on the life of my children I have never been unfaithful to my wife. Do you hear me? NEVER! Not once.

He looks at them. They avoid eye contact.

WALSH

Okay, back to business. The elections stoppeth for no man.

(MORE)

WALSH (CONT'D)

The party's gonna go into emergency session in the next few days, and try to salvage something from this fiasco. They'll need to find a new candidate very fast. I've recommended they pick Lydia, and I've told them this is the best team there is. She's gonna need all the help she can get after this.

He looks at the lifeless crowd in front of him.

BROWN

You've quit?

WALSH

Get real, Fred. You, of all people, must know that, with this crap sticking to me, especially the DNA test, I'm toast. I suggest you all pack up and head for California.

Some of the team break into tears. They slowly start to pack up their things.

INT. COFFEE SHOP -- DAY

Veronika and Greg sit in the corner with Somber Man.

SOMBER MAN

Your Miss Weaver is getting too nose-y. Be careful.

VERONIKA

Don't worry about her. They're just milking the story while they can. Perfectly normal.

GREG

She should never have come to the house.

VERONIKA

(angrily)

I didn't ask her to come. You should be more careful what you leave lying around. I-

SOMBER MAN

Never mind that. Time to start winding down. No more interviews. You should go away for a while.

VERONIKA

What do I tell them?

He looks at her disappointed.

SOMBER MAN

Really? After all the training we've invested in you, you can't come up with something.

VERONIKA

You're right. I'll handle it.

SOMBER MAN

Now, the baby. Have you sorted out the adoption yet?

VERONIKA

But... I was thinking I might-

GREG

You're no use to us with a baby. We had a plan. Stick to it.

The somber man gets up.

SOMBER MAN

And I don't need to remind you: no loose ends!

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT - OUTSIDE CORRIDOR -- EVENING

Susan and Jack arrive. She takes the key out of her purse.

SUSAN

Strange. Why isn't Gandalf barking?

She raises the key to the door, but it is already slightly ajar. Their expressions drop. They look at one another. Now they are scared, real scared.

Jack gently gestures for Susan to get behind him. He puts his ear to the door. He pushes the door open enough to be able to look in. It SQUEAKS. He nearly wets himself!

JACK

(quietly)
Gandalf?

Nothing. Jack looks at Susan. What should we do? He looks around for a weapon. The only thing to hand is a fire extinguisher. He grabs it. Jesus, it's heavy!

He signals Susan to slam the door open. Bracing herself, she pushes it wide open in one swift motion.

They wait a moment. Nothing. No movement. No sound. Jack feels a little more confident.

JACK

Call 911. I'll go in.

SUSAN
Are you crazy? Wait for the police.

JACK
They've already gone. Call 911.

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Susan dials 911 and follows him in. She tries the light switch, but nothing. The room is in darkness, but the light streaking in from outside is sufficient to show the place has been ransacked.

SUSAN
Oh, my God! Gandalf!

She rushes to the dog lying motionless on the floor.

At that moment, a man suddenly emerges from the shadows, wielding a crow bar. He rushes at Jack.

SUSAN
Jack! Watch out!

Jack spins round and lifts the fire extinguisher. Susan grabs a vase from the table and throws it at the man. It hits the back of his head, causing his strike with the crow bar to misfire. It bounces off the extinguisher, grazing Jack's forehead, drawing blood.

Jack throws the extinguisher at the silhouette, hitting him in the leg. The intruder CRIES with pain. He grabs a side table and hurls it at Jack, who falls to the ground, momentarily stunned. He lunges at Susan.

NEIL (O.S.)
Suze! Are you all right?

SUSAN
HELP! BURGLAR! CALL THE POLICE!

NEIL (O.S.)
Ohmigod! Ohmigod!

The intruder hesitates, then tosses an ornament at Susan. It misses. He limps to the patio door and escapes. Susan slumps by the side of the dog and weeps.

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT -- LATER

A couple of POLICEMEN are taking notes. Susan kneels by the dog, tears silently running down her cheeks. Jack, oblivious to the blood on his face, puts a comforting hand on her shoulder. Neil stands by, horrified.

POLICEMAN 1
(to Neil)
And you didn't hear anything?

NEIL
Not until Suze came home.

POLICEMAN 2
(to Susan)
So, that's it? Your TV and iPad are still here. Looks like you were lucky - you interrupted them before they could take anything.

SUSAN
Thank God my laptop was in the car.

POLICEMAN 1
They usually come in through the back, out of sight. You might want to consider putting bars on these.

JACK
But they came in through the front door.

POLICEMAN 2
Yea? Unusual, that.

Both policemen have the weary look of men who long ago gave up on a vastly unequal struggle. They shrug.

POLICEMAN 1
We'll send you the police report for the insurance.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- MORNING

A fragile Susan is sitting in Marty Harris' office.

SUSAN
The police think it was local punks. Bullshit. Jack's place was also ransacked last night.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Bachelor pad, thoroughly tossed. Jack and Susan survey the damage. Jack picks up his camera bag. It is empty.

SUSAN (V.O.)
I didn't want to stay in my apartment last night, so we went to his. Trashed, just like mine. But they did steal stuff.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- MORNING

SUSAN

They took his TV, the usual stuff.
Plus his cameras.

HARRIS

What do the police say?

SUSAN

Coincidence! Can you believe that?

HARRIS

Who knows? Look, if you want the
rest of the day off, no problem.

SUSAN

No. No. I want to know what's going
on here. I'm missing something. Oh,
talking of missing - the one thing
they *did* take from my place was a
load of photos Jack had printed out
for me - mostly the baby.

HARRIS

Photos, but not the TV?!

SUSAN

Exactly! We were gonna get one
framed for Veronika. They got the
original memory card when they took
Jack's camera, but luckily, they're
all backed up in the cloud, so we-

HARRIS

There's some weird shit going on
here. You be careful, Ace. Watch
your back. These politicos have
powerful friends.

INT. WALSH CAMPAIGN HQ, CONNECTICUT -- LATER

Everything is packed up. Brown and Lucy sit down over coffee.

LUCY

(checking her watch)
The limo should be here any minute.
Look, Fred. I gotta ask. Do you-?

BROWN

Do I believe him?

LUCY

Yeah. It's so out of character.

BROWN

I agree, but if this job has taught me anything it's that ANYONE can fall off the straight and narrow at any time.

LUCY

He's still absolutely adamant.

BROWN

That's what gives me pause for thought. He's not the sort to brazenly lie, especially when the facts are so overwhelming. There's gotta be some kinda explanation for all this.

LUCY

Thank God I'm not the only one. I think I do believe him. But the DNA!! It always comes back to the damn DNA.

BROWN

The thing is no one seems to care about the infidelity - besides Jane, obviously. Gotta love how the general consensus is he was a fool 'cos he should've used a condom.

INT. L.A. HOTEL ROOM -- MORNING

Brown and Lucy are having breakfast in bed.

LUCY

Who would want to do this?

BROWN

This is politics, Lucy.

LUCY

Let's start with the obvious suspects, the three other parties. They're all happy as shit right now that he self-destructed, just weeks before the election.

BROWN

Okay, tiger, if you really wanna do this. Obviously we're still in uncharted waters since the two party system collapsed. Who the hell knows what the new norm is? Made my job a fuckin' nightmare, I can tell you.

LUCY

Let's go through them, one by one, starting with our lot.

BROWN

There's no shortage of people in politics just praying for you to fall on your face, and that includes those supposedly on your side. That said, who? Why? No way has the Lincoln Party benefited from this. Certainly not Lydia. They woulda wanted the story to break BEFORE the Convention. Afterwards is just too messy.

LUCY

That's what I figured. Next up: the Freedom Party.

BROWN

Ah, our ex-MAGA loons. I thank God every day we're not in bed with them anymore. They destroyed the Republican brand.

LUCY

Could it be them? Revenge for - God knows what?

BROWN

(laughs)

They're so obsessed with ideological purity, they spend most of their time attacking each other. They're an utter shambles. If I'm wrong, you have permission to blow my brains out.

LUCY

Speaking of purity, what about the Progressives?

BROWN

Exactly. They're no better than the Freedom Party. Couldn't organize a piss up at a brewery. All hair-shirts and virtue-signaling.

LUCY

So a no?

Brown SCOFFS.

BROWN

Think about it. We have them to thank for dealing the final death blow to the 2-Party system.

(MORE)

BROWN (CONT'D)

Conservatives were on the ropes after the split. We left an open goal for the Democrats. So what happens? It turns out the only thing keeping them together was their opposition to MAGA. With that gone, all the cracks opened up and they split as well. Sorry, but if that's a reflection of their strategic competence, no way they could plan and execute this.

LUCY

That leaves the Democrats.

BROWN

Don't see it myself. Your vanilla democrat, just like your vanilla republican - sorry, Lincolner - Godawful name, if you ask me - doesn't have that level of aggression or cunning. Who would be smart enough to...? Huh! To what, actually? We still don't REALLY know what happened here. Now *that's* clever! Much as I'd love to blame one of them, it's far too elaborate, and - promise never to repeat this! - even I don't think they would stoop that low.

LUCY

By the way, you wanted me to remind you to call your wife.

BROWN

Oh, yeah. Thanks.

INT. RODRIGUEZ CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN HQ - LATER

Brown and Lucy oversee the mayhem as volunteers set up new campaign headquarters. Lucy's mind is clearly elsewhere.

LUCY

Who hates Bill so much they'd go to all this trouble?

BROWN

Let it go, kid. You're getting too emotionally involved. This is politics. It may not be personal.

Lucy's phone RINGS.

LUCY

Kelly.

SUSAN (O.S.)
Susan Weaver. We should talk.

INT. STARBUCKS -- DAY

Susan is sitting in an armchair, sipping coffee. Lucy joins her, putting her notebook down on the table.

LUCY
What's this all about?

SUSAN
Do you really think you can
intimidate us this way?

LUCY
By coming here for coffee!?

SUSAN
You know what I'm talking about -
the break-ins, killing my dad's
dog.

LUCY
What are you talking about?! You've
been watching way too many movies.
YOU'RE the one persecuting US,
remember?

SUSAN
Someone's trying to shake us down,
and your guy's got friends in high
places.

LUCY
Could you blame him? You've ruined
a perfectly decent man. It's a pack
of lies, from beginning to end.

SUSAN
Don't give me that. He's no angel.
You do know he took money from the
mob years ago?

LUCY
Are you high?

SUSAN
Face it. He lied. You-

LUCY
You might think I'm irrational, but
he never did this. I know. I know.
You're gonna bring up "The DNA".
But it isn't him, believe me!

SUSAN

Okay, I'll play along. Let's assume for a moment he *is* innocent. Then who, why and how?

LUCY

You don't think we've been trying to figure that out for ourselves? We've been over it all a thousand times. Total blank.

SUSAN

Exactly. That's my point. Sometimes it really does boil down to the simplest explanation. If Walsh is innocent, how on earth did the baby end up with his DNA?

LUCY

You media types are all the same. Alpha cynics. Bottom-feeders. You're so corrosive.

SUSAN

Kettle calling the pot black?

LUCY

You WANTED there to be a scandal. You WANTED to take Bill down.

SUSAN

Whoa! Slow down there. Don't shoot the messenger. Everything Veronika has told us has checked out.

LUCY

Well, how come no one - and I mean NO ONE - in the Campaign recognizes her? Walsh is chaperoned by dozens of people the whole time. And, since the accident, he's had 24 hour protection. How on Earth did he manage to sneak in that tramp without anyone noticing?

SUSAN

I don't want to prick your bubble, but, you know that fundraising event where the picture was taken?

LUCY

Obviously.

SUSAN

We got hold of all the media footage and photos of the night. The metadata shows a half hour gap where he is nowhere to be seen.

LUCY
I don't believe it.

SUSAN
You sure are stubborn, Lucy. If nothing else, DNA doesn't lie. Unless someone's perfected pregnancy by handshake, how did it happen? Another Immaculate Conception?

LUCY
This is ridiculous. I'm off.

Lucy starts to get up. Susan grabs her arm.

SUSAN
Lucy, for better or worse, I have my father's voice in my head every day, all day. If I'm wrong, I promise you I will be the first to make it public.

Lucy sits down again.

SUSAN
Just to be clear, I have nothing against Walsh personally - except maybe he looks like a bit of a scumbag right now.

Lucy is about to interject, but stops herself.

SUSAN
Give me something, anything. If there's a different truth, you're gonna have to help me find it.

LUCY
We went through all the obvious possibilities.

INT. WALSH CAMPAIGN HQ, CONNECTICUT -- DAY

Camera is tight on Walsh.

LUCY
Sperm Bank?

WALSH
No.

LUCY
Evil twin?

WALSH
I think I'd know.

LUCY

Cloning?

WALSH

Don't be ridiculous. I'm not a sheep.

INT. STARBUCKS -- DAY

SUSAN

What other explanation is there?

LUCY

You know Bill's got a birthmark?

SUSAN

Yeah. Veronika said he's got a blotch - here, I think.

Susan taps the inside top of her right leg.

LUCY

Shit! How...? Why is she doing this? Blackmail? Child support?

SUSAN

She's never mentioned money.

LUCY

Don't you find that suspicious? She's not exactly independently wealthy, nor is she living a life of luxury. Bill Walsh is a VERY rich man. Why not get something for the baby, at least?

Susan looks uneasy.

SUSAN

Yea, that's surprised us as well. She just doesn't seem to be motivated by money at all. Besides, have you seen her? She's gorgeous. She could have seduced no end of men, much richer and younger than Walsh, just by blinking at them.

LUCY

I know he's innocent, and if you spoke with him, you would too. You should speak with him.

SUSAN

(surprised)

He would speak with me? Even now, after all this?

LUCY

He's not an ogre. Let me see what I can do.

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM -- DAY

Susan holds the phone on her shoulder, while furiously jotting down notes. She has a cup of coffee on her desk.

SUSAN

Are you sure about this? How do you know this?

She puts the receiver down thoughtfully. She sends an email.

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM -- EVENING

There are now several empty cups on her desk. She grabs a page from the printer and stares at it in disbelief.

SUSAN

Well, bugger me!

Jack comes up, as Susan puts the paper in her bag.

JACK

You called, m'lady. What's that?

SUSAN

I don't know yet. Let's go.

Susan grabs his sleeve and leads him out.

INT. PARK HYATT HOTEL, 12TH FLOOR CORRIDOR -- EVENING

A Secret AGENT opens the door. He beckons Susan to come in. He puts his hand in front of Jack.

AGENT

You wait downstairs.

Jack looks at Susan. She reassures him it's okay.

INT. PARK HYATT HOTEL, SUITE -- MOMENTS LATER

Susan sits nervously at the dining table. Walsh comes in from the bedroom. Susan is shocked how tired and ashen he looks, but he still cuts an impressive figure.

WALSH

You have a nerve, I'll give you that, Miss Weaver. Who would blame me if I got George here to throw you over the balcony?

The agent stands impassively by the balcony door.

AGENT

Head first, or feet first, sir?

Walsh smiles appreciatively at the agent. Susan straightens up in an attempt to appear confident. A flood of emotions flickers across Walsh's face. He bites his lower lip, then takes a deep breath.

WALSH

Against my better judgment, and only because Lucy... You've got ten minutes.

Walsh sits down opposite her.

WALSH

Believe me, Miss Weaver, I consider you one of the lowest forms of life. I may have lost the presidency, thanks to you. That's one thing. But I can never forgive...

His eyes moisten. His voice falters.

INT. WALSH'S CAR - EVENING

Jane is driving, her eyes red from crying. The kids are in the back. Elizabeth, stares out the window, angry. Nathan stares blankly, numb. Mark is asleep, a teddy in his arms.

WALSH (V.O.)

... what I can never forgive is how casually you destroyed my family.

He SNIFFS, then regains his composure.

WALSH (V.O.)

But anger is so destructive and counterproductive.

INT. PARK HYATT HOTEL, SUITE -- CONTINUOUS

WALSH

Before we get to the baby, it seems I have to set you straight on something else.

SUSAN

Sir?

WALSH

Lucy tells me you now think I'm linked to the mafia.

(MORE)

WALSH (CONT'D)

Really, Miss Weaver, you have such a vivid imagination - you should be writing soap operas.

SUSAN

Why did you take money from Harry Schenker then, and vote for his highway project?

WALSH

Oh, Schlenker! That's what you're on about. CHECK THE TIMELINE! No one knew he was mafia back then. As far as we were concerned, he was just another businessman. We spend so much time fundraising, we can't possibly check the provenance of every donation.

SUSAN

But that's-

WALSH

Don't be naive, Miss Weaver. Forget what you learned in school, all that "Government of the people, by the people, for the people" stuff. Huh! This is not really a democracy - it's a plutocracy. Always has been, right from the very beginning. The American Revolution? All those wonderful ideals the colonists applied to justify their rebellion? They were tacked on afterwards. What was it really about? Money. That's all. Nothing's changed. Politics is a brutal business in this country. Money rules. Pure and simple.

SUSAN

That's very cynical, isn't it?

WALSH

That's rich, coming from a journalist! We politicians come under the most intensive scrutiny, nothing off limits. Everything is fair game. But you guys can destroy us with a casual click on the keyboard. It doesn't even have to be true - as I've learned to my cost. Once it's on the internet, it NEVER goes away... ever! The damage is permanent.

SUSAN

So, why do it then? If you can't stand the heat-

WALSH

(ironical chuckle)

Huh! Despite what I just said, for all its faults, this is still a great country, and I want to serve.

SUSAN

What about the baby?

WALSH

(sarcastically)

Ah, right. Much more serious issue than Mafia connections. I want to make this VERY clear.

He holds her gaze.

WALSH

As my godfather George Bush Senior famously said: Read... My... Lips. I do not know Miss Marsden. I never had sex with Miss Marsden. As far as I am aware, that crowd photo with Miss Marsden - assuming it is genuine - is the only time I ever came in contact with Miss Marsden - and it is literally one of thousands of such photographs. Now, unless I have unknowingly developed the ability to impregnate women through Osmosis, I am not that baby's father.

SUSAN

But the DNA, Sir. How-?

WALSH

I have no idea. You're the... "Star investigative reporter". You figure it out. But I guarantee you, I have never been unfaithful to my wife.

SUSAN

What about your son in England?

Walsh physically recoils. Susan hands him the paper she printed in the office. He doesn't look at it.

WALSH

How did you-?

SUSAN

So it's true?

Walsh visibly shrinks. He shakes his head wearily.

WALSH

Look, no one knows about this - except my family. It was long before I ever met my wife. I was a Rhodes scholar in Oxford. I didn't even know she was pregnant when I left. She wanted to keep the baby, and I respected that.

SUSAN

Don't you think it looks bad that it's all so hush hush?

WALSH

Maybe to you. The mother is a formidable woman, fiercely independent. She's a brilliant academic, and a fantastic, loving parent. He's a great kid, a real credit to her.

SUSAN

How do you know?

WALSH

Because we've stayed in touch all these years, and the kid's been to visit us many times. But she's always been adamant about their privacy. And why not? They're not public figures.

(sadly)

Are you now going to wreck their lives as well? Why should they pay for my sins? You guys are destroying the body politic with your impossible high standards. Everyone's got some skeletons in their closet.

SUSAN

Maybe, but yours have pulses.

WALSH

Very amusing, Miss Weaver. It's amazing, though, isn't it? I've done so much for my country - nearly died fighting for it - and now everything will be forgotten because of this... this... nonsense. That's all the media can be bothered with. That's what'll come up in Google searches until the end of time.

(shakes his head)

(MORE)

WALSH (CONT'D)

But even if I had fathered this child, what difference does it really make? Would I really be a worse President? Tell me.

SUSAN

It's a question of credibility.

Walsh smiles sarcastically.

WALSH

Miss Weaver, you are even more naive than I thought. Believe me, even if I had come straight out and admitted the child was mine, I would still have been crucified.

Walsh gets up and starts to move away.

WALSH

I knew this was a bad idea. I think I've given you enough time.

SUSAN

Senator, are your people trying to intimidate us?

WALSH

What are you talking about?

SUSAN

I've been followed. My house has been burgled, and my father's dog killed. All this week.

WALSH

Quite the fantasist, aren't you, Miss Weaver? You flatter yourself.

He sits back down at the table.

WALSH

My guess is you are an unwitting pawn in all this. And from what you've just said, you've stirred up some hornet's nest of God knows what. Be careful, Miss Weaver: Miss Marsden is not what she seems. Find out what really happened and you will have the real story of the year, not this crap you've been publishing.

Walsh shuffles sadly out of the room. The agent beckons Susan to leave. With a totally straight face, he offers her the choice of door or window.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR -- EVENING

Jack drives while Susan is deep in thought.

JACK

Well? How'd it go? Dig up any more bodies?

SUSAN

In a way, yes, but never mind that. I'm getting a really bad feeling about this story. And what am I going to tell my dad about Gandalf? He already despises what I do.

JACK

When he sees the whole picture, he'll understand. Sure he will.

SUSAN

What IS the whole picture, Jack? I'm not so sure any more.

JACK

You saved us all from a lying, cheating-

SUSAN

He might NOT be lying, Jack.

JACK

What?! Okay, tell me what happened.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- EVENING

Susan walks into Harris' office.

HARRIS

Why the long face? You should be on top of the world.

SUSAN

Long day. Just tired, I guess. I met Walsh briefly.

HARRIS

Surprised he didn't kill you!

SUSAN

The thought crossed his mind! Do you think we published too quickly, Marty?

HARRIS

Jesus, Susan. Give it a rest. They've really spooked you, haven't they?

(MORE)

HARRIS (CONT'D)

It's a bit late to be worrying about that now. The genie's outta the bottle. Look, every time you start to have doubts, just chant to yourself: DNA. Case closed.

SUSAN

Yeah, you're right. I don't get it, though. Despite all the evidence, he's still absolutely adamant he's innocent. I almost believed him.

HARRIS

Wouldn't be the first politician to blatantly lie to your face.

INT. L.A. RESTAURANT -- EVENING

Jack and a more subdued Susan are in a private room at an expensive restaurant. Veronika, very elegant, enters.

SUSAN

(quietly to Jack)

Let's see if we can get anything new out of her?

JACK

Okay.

(to Veronika)

Wow, Veronika, you look awesome.

VERONIKA

Thanks. This is the first time I've been out since I don't know when. It feels good.

JACK

Well, you deserve it.

The waiter fills their champagne glasses.

ALL

Cheers!

JACK

I can't believe Walsh was such an asshole. He still denies it. Can you believe that?

SUSAN

I used to think he was a man of integrity. Just goes to show - you can't judge a book by its cover.

JACK

How did you meet the sleaze-ball, anyway?

VERONIKA

At a party.

JACK

Where?

SUSAN

She met him here in L.A. last year.
Don't you read your own paper,
Jack?

JACK

I just look at the pictures.
(turns to Veronika)
Sorry, Veronika.

VERONIKA

That's okay.

JACK

How did you get passed all the
minders?

VERONIKA

He gave me a drink and asked me to
his room.

SUSAN

He's got balls, I'll give him that.

JACK

Was that the big Hollywood
fundraiser?

SUSAN

Yea. Made quarter of a million
bucks in one night.

JACK

Nice!

SUSAN

Beverly Wilshire Hotel, right?

VERONIKA

Yea, that's right.

JACK

Those tickets cost thousands. Were
you invited?

VERONIKA

Why are you asking all these
questions?

Susan looks surprised by Veronika's reaction.

SUSAN
Hey, it's okay, Veronika. We're all
friends here.

VERONIKA
Sorry. I was, er, working at the
hotel.

JACK
Nothing to be ashamed of.

SUSAN
So, what was he like?

JACK
Did you realize he was such a
schmuck?

VERONIKA
No. He was charming.

SUSAN
Hang on. Wasn't Walsh still injured
from his accident last year?

VERONIKA
Accident?

JACK
You don't know? He was nearly
killed in a car crash.

SUSAN
Broke his leg, didn't he?

She looks at Jack sternly and nods forcefully. He nods.

JACK
That's right. Totally buggered, it
was.

VERONIKA
Yes. You're right. He told me he
hurt his leg in an accident. But he
still had the moves.

SUSAN
(laughing)
Well, that's what matters!

EXT. L.A. RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

As Jack and Susan wait for the valet to bring their car,
Veronika leaves in a limo. A burly security guy gets into an
SUV with darkened windows across the road and follows it.

JACK

Did you see that? It's one of those goons from the park.

Susan looks but it's too late.

SUSAN

What? How do you know? Security guys all look the same to me.

Jack looks at the tail-lights of the SUV disappearing. He is no longer so sure.

SUSAN

Stay focused. Don't you think she was behaving strangely?

JACK

She did seem very edgy.

SUSAN

Yea, weird. Before, she'd talk about Walsh a lot, but this time she totally clammed up. And now I think about it, she always avoided specifics. She'd go on about how nice he was - that sort of stuff. How could she confuse his arm injury with his leg?

INT. PRESSROOM, L.A. POST -- MORNING

Susan is at her computer. Harris walks up.

HARRIS

Still digging?

SUSAN

Veronika said she worked at the Beverly Wilshire. But the fund-raising was at the Peninsula.

HARRIS

So?

SUSAN

I called the Beverly Wilshire. They've no record of her working there. Nor has the Peninsula.

HARRIS

Under that name. Maybe she used another name. Cash-in-hand, to avoid tax.

SUSAN

But why lie about the hotel?

HARRIS

Who knows? Maybe the truth is too embarrassing. Maybe she was a hooker. Maybe they fucked in a John. Doesn't matter how it happened, it happened. He got caught.

SUSAN

Yeah, but that's my point. Maybe there's an even bigger story here. Sure, it's his baby. But what if the whole thing is even more sordid? What if she was a hooker, like you said? What if there were a fleet of them? What does that say about the Mr Squeaky Clean we nearly put in the White House?

Now Harris' interest is well and truly piqued.

HARRIS

My God, Susan. I like where you're going with this. You could be right. Remember all that Christmas schmaltz? Bleagh!

SUSAN

Exactly. And I still don't understand how she paid all her medical bills. She only went to the best doctors and best hospital. She said her house mates helped out. But, get real - a bunch of stoner students? Gimme a break. Maybe Walsh has been paying all this time, hoping to keep her quiet.

Harris' face lights up at the prospect.

HARRIS

Go for it, Scoop!

SUSAN

First, I got to do something.

EXT. SUSAN'S FATHER'S HOME - DAY

Susan's father opens the door to Susan. He kisses her on the cheeks. He looks around for the dog. Susan holds his arm and starts to cry. He puts his arm around her. He dabs his eyes with his handkerchief.

I/E. SUSAN'S CAR -- DAY

Susan and Jack pull up outside Veronica's house.

SUSAN

Thanks for your help, Jack. I've got no idea who's telling the truth any more. The more I dig, the more things don't quite square. Hmmm. Come to think of it, where were you on the night in question?

JACK

If I tell you, I'll have to kill you! What does Marty think? He's not gonna be too happy if he loses his star story.

SUSAN

I've got him thinking Veronika might be a hooker. He's probably got the headline and exposé already mapped out in his head.

Jack nods appreciatively.

JACK

Genius! Well played!

She allows herself a small self-satisfied smile.

SUSAN

How did she get to him? Someone on the inside must have been in on this. He's surrounded by handlers 24/7. Someone knows something.

JACK

Why haven't they sold their story yet? Come to think of it, no one here's tried to cash in either.

SUSAN

Isn't it strange that that Progressive rottweiler Wrigley was standing next to her? We'd better check him-

JACK

Forget about that for now. Greg's watching us through the window. Time for gooey Happy Families.
(sighs)
You've got the story of the decade, and I'm taking baby pictures.

INT. VERONIKA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Jack takes lots of classic mother and child pictures. Susan looks on.

SUSAN

Getting some good ones, I hope,
Jack.

JACK

Huh! Do I tell you how to write?

VERONIKA

Look, I've been thinking and I've
decided to go away for a while.

SUSAN

What? Why?

VERONIKA

Whenever we go out, people stare.
Yesterday, someone at the mall
shouted "whore" at me.

INT. SHOPPING MALL -- DAY

A man is haranguing Veronika and the baby.

SUSAN (V.O.)

Oh my God! They didn't-?

VERONIKA (V.O.)

No. Luckily security-

A couple of security guys sidle up to the heckler and whisk
him away quietly. But these are NOT your usual mall cops -
they are several grades higher than that.

SUSAN (V.O.)

Thank God!

INT. VERONIKA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

VERONIKA

All this attention isn't good for
the baby - nor me.

SUSAN

Where are you going? How long?

VERONIKA

I dunno yet. With the money you
gave me, we can go somewhere really
nice. It's for the best. I'll leave
next week after Alexandra's next
check-up.

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT -- DAY

This is a computer buff's wet dream. Fantastic top-end equipment everywhere - banks of processor and storage racks along one wall, and a plethora of monitors.

Neil opens the door to Susan carrying a cake.

SUSAN

Just a little thank you for the other day.

NEIL

No need. Chocolate? Nice. Thanks.

He takes the plate. Awkward moment.

NEIL

Er, I'd invite you in, but, as you can see, it isn't really set up for receiving visitors.

SUSAN

No problem.

SUSAN

Wow! That's some serious kit.

NEIL

Only the best. Need it for my job - programming.

SUSAN

Who for? NASA? The Pentagon?

She CHUCKLES. He nervously joins in, but doesn't reply.

SUSAN

Impressive.

She starts to leave, then looks back at the room.

SUSAN

Hey. Could I ask you a favor?

NEIL

You can always ask.

SUSAN

Feel free to say no. I'm trying to figure out who killed my dad's dog, and I need to find out more about a couple of people who may know something.

Neil looks uncomfortable.

NEIL

Doesn't your paper have folk who specialize in that?

SUSAN

Yes, but I don't know who to trust any more.

Neil perks up.

NEIL

A conspiracy?

SUSAN

Could be. You're obviously a computer whiz, what with all this kit and all. And I would never tell anyone where the info came from, I promise.

Neil breaks into a smile.

SUSAN

Oh, another thing - could you trace who gave me the original tip off? I'll send you the details.

Neil looks excited. An adventure!

INT. PRESSROOM, L.A. POST -- LATER

Harris walks up to Susan, deep in thought, as she sifts through pictures of Veronika and the baby.

HARRIS

How's it going, Ace?

SUSAN

We're double-checking everything. Turner's checking with Vice to see if any known hookers match Veronika's description. Lee is looking for links between her and Wrigley. And I've asked a well-connected friend to do background checks on both Veronika and Greg - unofficially, of course.

HARRIS

Do you think Greg's her pimp?

SUSAN

He behaves like one - very possessive. He says they're cousins - as if.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

The only thing that's clear is those guys in the house couldn't afford a pizza, let alone the medical bills. I've checked with the hospital. They won't say anything officially, but, unofficially, they told me the bills were always paid in cash.

HARRIS

That's a lot of Benjamins to be carrying around.

SUSAN

Exactly. Who pays cash anymore? Seymore's been sweet-talking the cashier. Doesn't recognize Walsh or Greg, but does recognize Veronika - from the paper.

HARRIS

She recognizes Veronika from the paper, but not the Senator!? That's the Great American Public for you!

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM -- MORNING

A muffled but insistent KNOCK on the front door gets progressively louder until it finally awakens Susan. She sleepily looks at the clock: 04:35. She GROANS.

SUSAN

What the...?

INT. SUSAN WEAVER'S APARTMENT -- MORNING

Susan checks the spy-hole, then opens the door to Neil.

SUSAN

Jesus, don't you ever sleep? Come in.

Neil carefully stays to the side, outside the door frame. He makes the shhhh sign with his finger.

NEIL

(whispering)

Better you come next door.

Shot of Susan talking to someone offscreen outside the door
TRANSITIONS onto a monitor.

MONITOR OPERATOR (O.S.)

What's going on?

A hand picks up a phone.

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT -- MORNING

Neil looks up and down the corridor before closing the door.

SUSAN

What's with all the cloak and dagger stuff?

NEIL

Your apartment's bugged.

Susan wakens up with a jolt.

SUSAN

What!?

NEIL

Yeah. I regularly check mine for bugs, and it kept coming up positive. Couldn't figure out where they were, until I managed to narrow it down to your place. No offense, but it never occurred to me they'd want to bug you.

SUSAN

Who's they?

NEIL

Who knows? Never mind that now. I got the info you wanted. Just don't ask, okay? First, Greg Carter, aged 50. Comes from Russia.

SUSAN

Russia!?

NEIL

Yup. Real name: Gregor Karpov. Been in the US for about twenty years, mostly in the same house.

SUSAN

Russian?

NEIL

(mildly irritated)

Yea. People from Russia tend to be Russian. I checked his work history. Lots of short-term jobs, rarely more than 6 months or so at a time. Seems legit.

SUSAN

Any pattern?

NEIL

Not really. Convenience stores, gas stations, hospitals, department stores-

SUSAN

It all sounds a bit mundane for someone who's clearly well educated. His English is flawless. Anything about his time in Russia?

NEIL

Not yet. That wasn't easy to find. No time to look for the girl. I'll keep on them.

SUSAN

Thanks. I'm grateful, Neil, really I am, but why wake me up in the middle of the night for that?

NEIL

Prying eyes. Oh, those calls to you that day came from a burner. Never used again. Probably destroyed.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- LATER

Susan, Jack and Harris are sitting at a conference table. There are papers strewn all over it. There is a TV to one side, tuned to cable news. It is on mute.

SUSAN

Moscow found dozens of Gregor Karpovs, but look at this one.

She hands Jack a paper.

SUSAN

Same birthday, so, if the Green Card's right, this must be our guy. They're trying to get us a picture.

JACK

And?

SUSAN

It seems our Greg is a qualified doctor. Born in Riga, Latvia, to Russian parents - part of the Russian diaspora left stranded when the Soviet Union fell apart. Military service, then moved to Moscow to complete his medical studies. Quite the star, top of his class, senior doctor in a hospital.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Married a nurse called Elena, and had a son, Vassily. Then, as far as Russia is concerned, he and his family just vanished about twenty years ago. Timing sorta fits.

HARRIS

If it is him. That's all very interesting, but not really relevant to... well, anything really.

SUSAN

Maybe. But why would he throw all that away to come here?

HARRIS

No matter how much dressing you put on it, the Russian economy has always been a shit-sandwich - unless you're an oligarch. This city's full of foreign cabdrivers with PhDs. Maybe he had no choice. He had to feed his family somehow.

SUSAN

So, where's the family?

HARRIS

Who knows, but please, God, not the Russians. Anyone but the Russians.

JACK

Why?

HARRIS

'Cos so many people will just reflexively dismiss the story because of the Mueller Report.

SUSAN

What's the problem? They were exonerated.

HARRIS

Oh, you dear sweet innocent child. You're too young to remember, but I was a DC correspondent at the time. No, they most definitely were not exonerated. The Attorney-General Bill Barr quashed the Mueller Report, on very spurious grounds, to protect his boss. They got away with it. And you lot wonder why I'm such a cynical old bastard. Don't bother denying it.

JACK

If it'll make you feel any better,
it could be the Russian Mafia.
They'll do anything for money.

HARRIS

Those fucking psychos. No, that
does NOT make me feel any better.

SUSAN

Hang on, they're interviewing Bob
Pullman...

Harris turns the volume up on the TV.

INT. MSNBC NY STUDIO -- CONTINUOUS

BOB PULLMAN is on set with presenter, CARRIE KNIGHT.

CARRIE KNIGHT

This morning we are honored to have
Bob Pullman, the Democratic
Presidential nominee, in the studio
with us. Morning, Bob.

PULLMAN

Morning, Carrie. Pleasure to be
here.

CARRIE KNIGHT

The campaign's certainly gotten a
whole lot more interesting,
wouldn't you say?

PULLMAN

Sure has. We don't even know who
we're running against. Bill Walsh
still hasn't officially withdrawn,
despite the allegations-

CARRIE KNIGHT

Allegations? Surely, they're more
than that?

PULLMAN

Well, Carrie, I don't think it
would be appropriate for me to
comment any further. This must be a
very difficult time for his family.

CARRIE KNIGHT

Which one? He's got two.

Pullman feigns disapproval.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Harris presses the mute button.

HARRIS

Smug bastard. You can see he's trying his damndest not to gloat. He's as happy as a pig in shit.

SUSAN

Do you like any of them?

HARRIS

Nah! A pox on all their houses!

JACK

Do you ever vote, as a matter of interest?

HARRIS

Of course I vote. If you don't vote, you have no right to complain - and, as you know, that's my favorite pastime. So, what's next?

SUSAN

You won't believe this, but Walsh has agreed for Lucy Kelly to give me whatever I want.

HARRIS

No shit? He's got cajones, I'll give him that.

SUSAN

She gave Jack a copy of his official diary from when he declared as candidate.

HARRIS

Stop right there, Susan. Where are you heading with this? I thought you were following the hooker angle. You're not buying that innocent crap, are you?

He looks at her intensely for a moment.

HARRIS

Okay, enough, already. Just drop it. It's over. The facts speak for themselves.

Susan tries to object. He raises his hand to stop her.

HARRIS

No. You look terrible, exhausted. Take a vacation. Go to Hawaii. Get laid. Anything. Okay?

SUSAN

No, I'm fine, Marty, really I am.

HARRIS

I'm not asking you, Susan. I'm telling you. Go home! You are now officially on vacation.

INT. BRUCE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Susan sits on the sofa, nursing a glass of wine, still a little emotionally drained from earlier. Opposite her sit Jack and BRUCE, 30ish Aussie, an almost identikit copy of Jack, with bottles of beer. The two guys are clearly great friends. Jack raises his bottle.

JACK

Cheers, mate. I asked Bruce if he could throw some light on what's going on, stuff we can't see - and his place is probably safer.

SUSAN

He works for the Aussie consulate in L.A. How could that-

BRUCE

I still get to see most of the diplomatic traffic - and it's not pretty. I gotta be careful what I say, but I can give you the big strokes. To begin with, your media is fucking awful.

Jack raises a hand.

JACK

As Aussies, I think we should apologize upfront. No one has done more damage to democracy in the modern era than Rupert Murdoch - may he rot in Hell.

BRUCE

You might say that - I couldn't possibly comment. Not gonna argue, though.

SUSAN

What's that got to do with any of this?

BRUCE

He fucked your media, and now it's useless. All it does is shout "squirrel" in all directions while completely ignoring the real shit that's going on under the surface.

Susan leans forward intently.

BRUCE

If it weren't so tragic, it would be funny. You guys now stand virtually alone in the world - not that you would know it, with your "greatest country in the world" obsession. The bad guys always hated you - but that was a badge of honor, if you ask me. But now the good guys don't trust you. They've watched as America has done the unthinkable - abandoned democracies to invaders, fascists and tinpot dictators. You screwed NATO, the foundation stone for peace in Europe for almost a century.

Susan turns to Jack.

SUSAN

Am I missing something?

JACK

Let him finish.

BRUCE

Thanks, Jack. Because of your petty politicians, your democracy is no longer envied, admired, or even believed to be truly democratic. Walsh is spot on about that. When you see the sordid games that happened after the last election...

(shrugs sadly)

Anyway, the intelligence we're getting shows that just about everyone, friend and foe, is trying to put their fingers on the scale in this election. But the big money is trying to make sure no one can fix the system.

JACK

If this country stays paralyzed, they get to do whatever shit they want - as we've seen.

BRUCE

Look what's happening on the Russia-Kazakhstan border. My guess is the Russkies are just waiting for the chaos after the election before moving in. Who's gonna stop them?

SUSAN

Yikes. Have you got *any* good news?

Bruce shakes his head.

SUSAN

So, you're saying there are PLENTY of people who would absolutely hate Walsh's electoral reform program.

BRUCE

Yup, but you can narrow it down by the process of elimination. It's in your allies' interest for you guys to get your act together again. We need you.

JACK

So that eliminates the western countries - even France!

BRUCE

What you're left with is The Dark Side. Many of them are pulling out all the stops to make sure you keep fighting each other and ignore the rest of the world.

JACK

Tell her about-

BRUCE

Oh, yea. The diplomatic traffic is frantic. Of course, EVERYONE is analyzing it, commenting on it. But the more interesting thing is who didn't seem surprised by it.

SUSAN

The Russians.

BRUCE

I never said that.

SUSAN

How does Veronika fit into this? What are they up to?

Bruce shrugs.

BRUCE

That's the \$64,000 question! But never forget, some - how shall I put this? - "cold war adversaries" were especially skilled at playing the long game. Their network of sleeper moles was second to none.

EXT. SUSAN'S CAR -- EVENING

Susan is driving through the city. Her phone RINGS. Jack's voice comes over the loudspeaker.

INTERCUT Susan in her car, Jack in the office.

JACK

Hi, Susie. I know you're on your way to Hawaii, but, something for you to think about.

SUSAN

Okay.

JACK

Veronika's story squared perfectly with Walsh's calendar, as we expected, so I checked it against Greg's file. Nothing. None of his jobs were anywhere near Walsh, even when Walsh came here.

SUSAN

Fascinating, Jack, but I'm almost at the airport. Is this going anywhere?

JACK

Well, it might be nothing, but I did notice one thing. Greg has a complete work history since he arrived in the States. In twenty years, he's never been unemployed for more than a few days - except for last summer. He left Wal-Mart in June and didn't have a new job until the end of October. He resigned, no reason given.

SUSAN (V.O.)

Hey - not bad for a camera boy!

INT. GREG'S ROOM - DAY

Greg angrily slams down the headphones. He grabs his phone.

INT. LAX AIRPORT -- EVENING

Susan checks in, watched by two agents. When she walks away from the counter, they make a call.

INT. PLANE -- NIGHT

The plane is dark. Everyone is sleeping except Susan who is sifting through Walsh's diary, her notes, and other papers.

INT. PLANE -- DAY

Everyone is having breakfast and/or reading except Susan who is fast asleep, her mouth wide open. Her breakfast tray sits untouched in front of her.

INT. HONOLULU AIRPORT - ARRIVALS -- DAY

Two burly security guys scrutinize arriving passengers, checking against the picture of Susan on their phones.

INT. TAMPA AIRPORT -- MOMENTS LATER

Susan wearily walks through Tampa airport, wearing sunglasses and a headscarf. HOWARD ZIEGLER is waiting for her.

ZIEGLER

Susan. Great to see you again.

Susan is momentarily startled. They kiss each other on the cheek.

INT. HONOLULU AIRPORT -- DAY

The security guys look at each other and shake their heads. One makes a call.

INT. ZIEGLER'S CAR -- LATER

Susan puts her hair in a ponytail with a rubber band, and lies back on the headrest, her eyes closed.

ZIEGLER

So, what's with the strange email address, and all the secrecy?

SUSAN

I'm being bugged.

ZIEGLER

What? Who?

SUSAN
I don't know.

ZIEGLER
What about my family? I can't risk-

SUSAN
No one knows I'm here. Let's keep
it that way. Call me..

She sees a movie poster for a new Meryl Streep movie.

SUSAN
... Meryl.

ZIEGLER
O-k-a-y. Great story about Walsh,
by the way. Who'd've thought it?

SUSAN
(stifling a yawn)
Actually, I'm still working on it.

ZIEGLER
Ah, the accident? I took that over
after you, er-

SUSAN
- screwed up. I know! Can we
interview some of the witnesses?

ZIEGLER
Any particular reason?

SUSAN
I don't know. It's really the
moment his campaign took off. Up
till then, he was just a face in
the crowd.

Ziegler gives a knowing, mischievous smile.

ZIEGLER
Do I smell a book here? Just make
sure you spell my name right in the
Acknowledgements, okay? My Mom'll
love that.

SUSAN
Let's not jump the gun. First, let
me check in. Maybe you can set up
some appointments for later while I
take a quick shower.

Susan leans back on the headrest and closes her eyes. Ziegler
drives into town.

INT. GREG'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Greg, angry, sends an email with Susan's picture to a long list of recipients.

MONTAGE

Lots of agents around the country checking their phones as they receive the photo.

END MONTAGE

INT. JORGE PEREZ' HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

Jorge Perez, Walsh's driver the previous year, is sitting in his living room with Susan and Ziegler.

PEREZ

That's it. Next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital. Not sure I can add anything more to that.

Susan finishes her coffee and heads for the door.

SUSAN

Thank you very much for your time, Señor Perez. Much appreciated.

PEREZ

You're welcome.

EXT. JORGE PEREZ' HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

They go outside the door.

PEREZ

There is one thing, though, that's always puzzled me.

P.O.V. SNIPER

Crosshairs move about the screen.

ZIEGLER

What's that?

PEREZ

Why did that van try to overtake a second time, after he nearly killed himself the first time? He was an accident waiting to happen.

The sniper checks the picture of Susan on his phone, then puts it away.

Standing by the car, they bid each other farewell. Perez turns to go back inside.

The crosshairs land on Susan's head. She lowers her head to get in the car just as the sniper fires silently. The bullet goes through the rubber band holding her ponytail and hits Perez who falls back over the low hedge into the garden.

Susan reacts to the draught from the bullet with a shake of her head. She just assumes the band broke. They drive off.

SNIPER
(in Russian)
Shit!

EXT. TAMPA HOSPITAL -- LATER

Ziegler drives up to the hospital.

ZIEGLER
This is where they brought him
after the accident.

INT. TAMPA HOSPITAL - SURGEON'S OFFICE -- LATER

A very functional hospital office, with x-rays stuck on a white light board. The HEAD SURGEON sits behind his desk. Susan and Ziegler sit opposite him.

HEAD SURGEON
Yes, they were seriously wounded,
multiple cuts and bruises all over
their bodies. The Senator's left
arm was fractured. This IS all in
the public domain, you know.

SUSAN
We just want to make sure we have
everything.

HEAD SURGEON
Very well. Our job wasn't too
difficult, though. Fortunately for
them, an ambulance was passing by,
and the paramedics had already
stabilized them by the time they
got here.

SUSAN
That was lucky.

HEAD SURGEON
Definitely. Did you see the limo?
Total wreck.

INT. TAMPA HOSPITAL - RECEPTION -- MOMENTS LATER

Susan and Ziegler head for the exit. Susan notices the CCTV cameras high up on the walls. They approach the RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST
Hi, Howie. How's Margie?

ZIEGLER
Great, thanks, Jill. How's-?

SUSAN
Do you still have the tapes from when Senator Walsh was here?

RECEPTIONIST
Good Lord, no, dearie. That was nearly a year ago. They get wiped in rotation every few weeks.

SUSAN
Sorry, Howard. I seem to be wasting your time and everyone else's. I haven't found anything new or-

RECEPTIONIST
You could try the local TV station.

SUSAN
Pardon?

RECEPTIONIST
Yeah. They were doin' one of those fly-on-the-wall reality shows then. I guess they still got their tapes.

Susan looks at Ziegler.

SUSAN
Is that right?

ZIEGLER
Could be. Nothing to lose. Your flight ain't till tomorrow morning.

INT. WNKR STUDIO BUILDING - DAY

Susan and Ziegler are in a dark room with a bank of monitors and equipment, operated by Studio Engineer, JAIME LOPEZ.

LOPEZ
What exactly are you looking for?

ZIEGLER
Probably nothing, Jaime. Meryl just wants to see what there is.

LOPEZ

Well, this is what went out on the newscast.

INT. TAMPA HOSPITAL -- EVENING

NEWSREEL. Walsh is being rushed into ER on a gurney.

LOPEZ (O.S.)

We saw him brought in.

The gurney is pushed into a side room. A nurse stops the cameraman from following.

LOPEZ (O.S.)

They wouldn't let us in the emergency room.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Tsk! How could they?!

Lopez GRUNTS. The shot cuts to a picture of the wrecked limousine.

LOPEZ (O.S.)

There's the limo. Real mess.

End Of FOOTAGE.

INT. WNKR STUDIO BUILDING - DAY

Susan gets up to leave, then an idea hits her.

SUSAN

Do you still have the outtakes?

Lopez holds up an external disk drive.

LOPEZ

Sure. Copied it across when Howie called.

INT. TAMPA HOSPITAL -- EVENING

NEWSREEL. A busy ER department.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Fast forward to just before Walsh comes in.

The picture speeds up. When Lopez sees heightened activity on the footage, he returns to normal speed.

LOPEZ (O.S.)
 This is when they were told serious
 accident victims were coming in.

The door bursts open.

LOPEZ (O.S.)
 Here they come.

A paramedic rushes through the door, pulling the gurney.

LOPEZ (O.S.)
 Now the staff snap into action.
 It's just like TV. You really start
 to appreciate those shows when
 you've seen the real thing.

Doctors and nurses descend on the patient. It seems like chaos, but everyone is doing what they're trained for. The handheld camera pictures become jerky in the mayhem.

ZIEGLER (O.S.)
 Great footage, Jaime.

LOPEZ (O.S.)
 Thanks, man.

The gurney is followed in by a second paramedic. The hospital staff take over. The camera follows the patient - this is now the footage in the news item.

SUSAN (O.S.)
 Oh, my God!

INT. WNKR STUDIO BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

Susan looks momentarily stunned.

SUSAN
 Oh, my God! Rewind to when he's
 wheeled in through the door. Slow
 it down.

INT. TAMPA HOSPITAL -- CONTINUOUS

NEWSREEL. Slow motion. The first paramedic comes through the door.

SUSAN (O.S.)
 OK. Keep going.

The gurney carrying Walsh follows. Then the second paramedic comes in.

SUSAN (O.S.)
 OK. Slower now.

The camera is jerking all over the place as it tries to follow Walsh into the emergency room.

SUSAN (O.S.)
There! Stop! Back a few frames.

Lopez rewinds a few frames.

SUSAN (O.S.)
That's it! Stop! Oh, my God.

FREEZE FRAME of hospital scene. Susan moves in closer to the monitor and we see her silhouetted against the screen. Susan's finger points to the second paramedic whose face is only visible for a split second.

INT. WNKR STUDIO BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

Susan gazes wide-eyed at the screen.

SUSAN
Greg! Gregor! Whatever his name is.

Ziegler's cellphone rings.

ZIEGLER
Ziegler... What?... Okay, thanks, Jill.

Susan's excitement evaporates as she sees Ziegler's pale, worried expression.

ZIEGLER
That was the hospital. Jorge Perez' body was just brought in, shot outside his home this afternoon.

They stare at each other, confused and afraid.

INT. L.A. POST - EDITOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Susan looks tired and shaken. She freeze frames the grainy video picture for Harris.

HARRIS
You sure that's Greg? It's not the best-

Susan passes a large photo to Harris.

SUSAN
The TV station enhanced it. No doubt.

Harris paces up and down.

HARRIS

What the hell does all this mean?

Jack walks in. He looks at the screen.

JACK

Hey, that's Greg, isn't it?

Susan looks at Harris triumphantly.

SUSAN

You bet. I'll tell you what it can't be, Marty. It CAN'T be a coincidence. That's just too wild.

Susan turns to Jack.

SUSAN

I just found out what our friend Greg did after Wal-Mart. He worked as a paramedic in Tampa.

JACK

That's a sudden shift up the food chain.

SUSAN

That's not all. Howie's been checking around. No one knows where this ambulance came from. There was no bill. Nothing. No one recognized Greg's photo. Same in all the other local hospitals.

HARRIS

Okay. So Greg was there. Why?

Harris and Jack look at Susan. She shrugs.

SUSAN

Politics? Money?

JACK

What was he up to? He didn't hurt Walsh. He may even have saved him.

SUSAN

Yeah. But why... why'd they have to kill the driver? Such a nice guy.

JACK

What?! When?

HARRIS

Yesterday. Shot in the head. Must have been right after Susie was there. Ziegler says the police think it was a pro.

JACK

Who would want to assassinate a limo driver?

HARRIS

Exactly. I may have been dismissive in the past, but there are way too many coincidences going on here. What in God's name have you stirred up, Susan? This is escalating from a stupid scandal to some really serious shit. No one's gonna convince me the driver's death isn't related to your story somehow.

He opens the wall safe and pulls out money and three phones.

HARRIS

If I'm right, these guys are well-resourced, and well-connected. You're not safe anymore, Susan. And that includes your sidekick here. This is serious shit. You do exactly what I say, you hear me?

Deadly serious, he points a finger right into Susan's face.

HARRIS

And I mean it this time. No fucking about, capiche?

He swaps Susan's and Jack's phones for the burners from the safe. He takes out the batteries from the old ones.

HARRIS

Only use these burner phones from now on. Do not call anyone else - assume everyone's bugged. Leave your cars here. Take cars from the pool downstairs. NO credit card transactions.

JACK

A bit melodramatic, isn't it?

HARRIS

Walsh's driver is now worm food. You want to take your chances, be my guest. But you resign first. No one dies on my watch, okay?

JACK

Okay. Got it.

HARRIS

Good. You do not go home tonight. Check into a hotel. Fake name.

(MORE)

HARRIS (CONT'D)

Pay cash. Don't tell anyone - even
me - where you are.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Susan tosses and turns in the bed. Suddenly, she sits bolt upright. The bedside clock shows 3:15

SUSAN

Eureka! That's it!

She leaps up and opens her laptop.

INT. SUSAN'S RENTAL CAR -- DAY

Susan is on a hands-free call.

SUSAN

Right, I'm on my way.

She switches on the radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

... and the New York Times lead story
this morning is that Senator Walsh
has called a press conference for
this evening. Sources close to the
campaign are saying he will
officially withdraw from the
Presidential race and endorse Lydia
Rodriguez as Lincoln Party
candidate.

SUSAN

Shit.

Susan pulls the car to the side of the road and opens her notebook. She enters a number into the phone. It RINGS.

SUSAN

(to herself)

Sorry, Marty. This is too goddam
urgent. Come on. Come on. Answer
the damn thing, won't-

It stops ringing. Before anyone can speak, an excited Susan yells down the phone.

SUSAN

Lucy. Listen very carefully...

INT. RODRIGUEZ CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN HQ -- DAY

Lucy is on the phone with Susan. Her expression changes to one of complete surprise.

INT. L.A. HOSPITAL - CONSULTANT'S OFFICE - DAY

A CONSULTANT is deep in thought. She rubs her chin. Susan sits nervously, tapping her pencil against her notebook.

CONSULTANT
Ingenious, but not impossible.

INT. SUSAN'S RENTAL CAR -- LATER

Susan is on the phone.

SUSAN
Thanks, Marty. Don't be late!

She hangs up and dials again.

SUSAN
Did you get all that?

JACK (O.S.)
No worries, Susie, I got it. I'll make the reservation, and Veronika'll be there.

SUSAN
Cheers. I really appreciate all your help these last few weeks. Above and beyond.

JACK
Worth a nice dinner for two when all this is over?

SUSAN
(smiling)
Over and out. Ten four.

She hangs up. The traffic is crawling. Impatiently, she thumps the steering wheel.

SUSAN
Move it, assholes.

INT. L.A. POST - PRESSROOM / VERONIKA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Jack calls Veronika, nursing the baby. She nods.

EXT. DOWNTOWN OFFICE BUILDING -- DAY

A furious Greg bursts out onto the street. A car SCREECHES to a halt. The driver sticks his head out the window.

DRIVER
Are you fucking crazy?

Greg pulls a gun. He hauls the cowering driver out, gets in and VROOMS off, tires SQUEALING.

EXT. ANATOLIA PALACE RESTAURANT -- LATER

An upmarket Turkish restaurant. The street-side terrace has a glass wind-cheater to protect the diners. Susan sits impatiently at a table, checking her watch, then the street, then her watch again.

EXT. L.A. FREEWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Greg drives like a maniac. When he gets stuck behind a dithering driver, he fires a shot. It soon pulls over.

INT. ANATOLIA PALACE RESTAURANT -- CONTINUOUS

Jack leads Veronika, wearing a head scarf, to Susan's table. They all smile and kiss warmly. Jack double checks his two cameras, sets up his GoPro on a tripod, and starts recording.

SUSAN

Glad you could make it, Veronika.
Whoa! What happened to your face?

Susan notices a huge bruise on her left cheek.

VERONIKA

An accident. Not important. What's so urgent?

SUSAN

How's Alexandra? Haven't seen her for ages. Walking yet?

VERONIKA

100 meter champion, like her mom.

Veronika relaxes. Jack takes some still photos. Veronika is very self-conscious about hiding the bruise. She looks around, suspicious.

VERONIKA

What's this all about?

Susan sees a limousine arrive in front, but slightly to the side of, the restaurant. It is on Veronika's blind side.

SUSAN

We've got a wonderful surprise for you. You see, I was thinking back to when we first met.

Veronika smiles nervously.

SUSAN

You were clearly upset by Walsh's despicable behavior. He refused to recognize his own daughter. Who sorta schmuck does that?

VERONIKA

Not a gentleman.

SUSAN

Exactly! So, I was thinking, what would make Veronika happier than anything else in this world?

Veronika looks at her confused.

Susan nods to someone offscreen. Jack stands up with his cameras ready. He checks the video camera is getting everything. Susan turns to the camera.

SUSAN

Yes, Veronika, after much effort, the L.A. Post has delivered what no one else could. Here... is... Alexandra's father!

Veronika almost faints when she sees Bill Walsh walk to the table. Jack's cameras CLICK away furiously.

WALSH

Miss Weaver.

Walsh kisses Susan on the cheek.

WALSH

Miss Marsden, I presume.

He holds out his hand. Veronika weakly responds. Jack moves around rapidly to get the best angles.

WALSH

Or should I say "Miss Maskhadova"?

Veronika is stunned.

VERONIKA

What? How-?

SUSAN

I have a brilliant, er, colleague, who finally cracked through the layers of your identity.

They all sit. Walsh's expression is benign.

WALSH

How is my daughter, Alexandra? Do you have a picture?

Veronika looks around.

WALSH

Yes, Miss Marsden - let's stick with Marsden for the moment, shall we? Yes, Alexandra IS my baby. I know that now. DNA cannot lie.

VERONIKA

But-

WALSH

But we've never met?

Veronika recovers her composure.

VERONIKA

Yes we did. The photo proves it.

WALSH

Ah, these days, with photoshop and AI, that doesn't prove anything. But you're right, of course. We *did* meet... briefly. Please excuse my forgetfulness. You see, what has been worrying me is how I managed to get a woman pregnant with a handshake.

JACK

Veronika said you had sex in a hotel room.

WALSH

Sorry, you are?

JACK

Jack Foster, Sir... er, Susie's photographer.

Walsh shakes Jack by the hand. He turns back to Veronika. His voice is friendly and calm, but firm.

WALSH

You see, Susan has now convinced me Alexandra is my daughter.

Veronika looks at Susan. Susan flashes her a broad smile and nods.

EXT. L.A. STREET -- CONTINUOUS

The traffic has ground to a halt. Greg is getting impatient. He drives up onto the sidewalk, scattering pedestrians and newspaper vending machines.

EXT. ANATOLIA PALACE RESTAURANT -- CONTINUOUS

SUSAN

See, Veronika. I told you we'd take care of things.

WALSH

And I intend to do what's right by my child..

Veronika looks surprised.

WALSH

... while her mother is in jail for fraud, and probably a dozen other felonies besides.

VERONIKA

I don't know what you're talking about.

Walsh turns to Susan.

WALSH

Actually, I would like to hear this myself, so, if you'd be so kind.

SUSAN

Certainly, Sir.

SUSAN

Like you, we ruled out the usual suspects - sperm banks, etc - a long time ago, so, assuming you were telling the truth, there had to be another way they got the sperm to make the baby.

EXT. TAMPA ROAD -- NIGHT

We see the accident again, but from a different perspective. The van deliberately forces the car off the road. An ambulance follows, about 100 yards behind it.

SUSAN (V.O.)

That accident in Florida was no accident. They were in the van that ran you off the road, and Greg - one of Veronika's housemates - was following in a fake ambulance.

Greg and assistants bring Walsh and Jorge on stretchers to the ambulance. Greg works to stabilize the injured, giving them injections and cleaning wounds. An assistant opens Walsh's pants.

SUSAN (V.O.)

We know he was a doctor in Russia.
We know he administered a lot of
painkillers to you and Jorge.

Greg holds up an empty syringe.

SUSAN (V.O.)

Presumably these also would have
numbed your, er, private parts.
Anyway, there is an IVF procedure
used for infertile couples called...

EXT. ANATOLIA PALACE RESTAURANT -- CONTINUOUS

Susan flips open her notebook to the relevant page.

SUSAN

... called "Percutaneous epididymal
sperm aspiration". Basically, the
doctor inserts a syringe into the...
"Caput epididymis"...

Jack looks puzzled.

SUSAN

Your balls, Jack. Just behind your
balls.

Jack and Walsh wince.

SUSAN

... and extracts... Sorry, this is
quite a mouthful...

She blushes when she realizes what she's said.

SUSAN

(reading)

... he extracts "adequate amounts of
epididymal fluid". Seeing as you
are clearly fertile, there was no
difficulty in extracting enough to
be sure of fertilization.

JACK

Awesome! They hoovered the sperm
out of your balls. I hope that
doesn't catch on!

WALSH

I'll say. My whole body was in such
a state after the accident, I never
noticed anything more than a little
local discomfort. And why worry
about that when you're trussed up
like an Egyptian mummy?

EXT. L.A. STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Greg jumps a red light and is struck by a van. The VAN DRIVER SHOUTS at him. Greg jumps out, CURSING in Russian, and points his gun at the other driver. His bravado immediately evaporates, and he WHIMPERS, his hands in the air.

VAN DRIVER

Sorry, man. My fault. I'll pay.

GREG

Shut the fuck up. Get out. Leave the keys.

He SHOOTS in the air to make his point. That spurs the van driver into action. He tumbles out of the van. Greg kicks him aside, climbs into the van, and ROARS off.

EXT. ANATOLIA PALACE RESTAURANT -- CONTINUOUS

Veronika looks around for a means of escape. She rubs her bruised cheek nervously. She slowly tries to open her purse.

SUSAN

Am I right, Veronika?

Suddenly, Susan jumps forward and knocks away the purse.

SUSAN

No sudden moves, please, Veronika. It's all over.

VERONIKA

For all of us. When they find me, they'll kill me. And my baby. And all of you as well.

SUSAN

Who, Veronika? Who?

VERONIKA

You gotta promise to take care of my baby.

WALSH

Do the right thing, and we'll make sure you're both safe.

VERONIKA

I'm as good as dead. The baby. You gotta promise-

WALSH

We'll do whatever we can for both of you. Now, what's going on?

The fight seems to go out of Veronika.

VERONIKA

You Americans, you think you're so wonderful. "The Greatest Country in the World", and all that crap. But you're fools, you know that? You meddle everywhere, and you've got no idea what you're doing. Vietnam. Iraq. You name it. It's none of your goddam business, but you interfere anyway. When we go to save our own people in Ukraine, you try to break us with sanctions.

WALSH

It was an illegal action.

VERONIKA

And Iraq wasn't?

JACK

What's this got to do with the senator?

VERONIKA

You go on about your "democracy", but it's just as corrupt as Russia. The difference is, we all know it's corrupt. You guys are blind. Your government is for sale - and for what? Chicken shit. You name it: gun control, farm subsidies, defense spending - all bought for with campaign contributions of... of... peanuts. Pathetic.

JACK

Why not do that then, instead of going through all this palaver?

VERONIKA

We do. You'd be amazed how many Congressmen are on our payroll. But foreign policy belongs to the President. We got to have the right guy, our guy, in the White House.

SUSAN

Pullman?

VERONIKA

Yes. We wanted Pullman, but he was never gonna win on his own. He's not interested in changing the constitution, so your chaos would continue. He's also more reasonable in international matters. He won't interfere. Senator Walsh is a hawk. We want an end to confrontation.

WALSH

You want us to give you free rein
to rebuild the Soviet Empire?

VERONIKA

What's it got to do with you? That
has always been our part of the
world, a bit like your Monroe
Doctrine, but with more
justification. There are 30m
Russians living there, outside the
motherland. They are our people.
It's our duty to protect them.

SUSAN

So you wanted the Senator to lose?

JACK

But why go to all that bother? If
you wanted him to lose, why not
just assassinate him?

WALSH

Thank you!

VERONIKA

Too messy. After Kennedy was shot-

SUSAN

You shot Kennedy!?!

VERONIKA

I never said that. But who would
have thought a civil rights ex-
teacher would escalate the Vietnam
war?

JACK

You could just fund his opponents.

VERONIKA

We do. Plus social media campaigns.
Still too unpredictable. That's why
we have a team of Chess Grand
Masters in the FSB who are
brilliant at this stuff-

JACK

FSB?

WALSH

KGB to you.

JACK

Ah.

EXT. BACK OF ANATOLIA PALACE RESTAURANT -- CONTINUOUS

Greg brings the car to a sudden halt and leaps out. He runs into the back of the restaurant. He is so quick, he catches Walsh's agent unawares and pushes him hard against a wall, knocking him out.

EXT. ANATOLIA PALACE RESTAURANT -- CONTINUOUS

WALSH

So much effort, just to stop me. I should be flattered, I guess.

VERONIKA

Every detail was worked out. Even you.

SUSAN

Me?

VERONIKA

Yes. We studied hundreds of profiles, of young tabloid reporters, outside of DC and New York - less sophisticated, lower resources. You were supposed to run with the story and that was it. Why did you have to interfere?

SUSAN

My job.

VERONIKA

Well, your job will cost us all our lives. They don't leave loose ends.

SUSAN

And you did all this, getting pregnant, having a baby, for your country?

VERONIKA

Yes - and for Oksana.

SUSAN

Your lover?

VERONIKA

You know about her? We wanted to start a family, so I volunteered. Walsh has good genes, from good stock, so why not!

SUSAN

Did you ever think about what you were doing to Walsh, to his family?

VERONIKA

Who cares? He's anti-Russia.

WALSH

Not true. I'm anti- your thuggish
government, not the Russian people.

Veronika spots Greg running towards them from inside the restaurant, pushing aside waiters as he passes. She recoils, startling everyone else.

(Russian dialog is subtitled)

GREG

(in Russian)

Shut the fuck up, Veronika. Say
nothing. They can't prove anything.

VERONIKA

(in Russian)

Run, Gregor. It's over. Get away
while you can.

Susan looks around anxiously.

SUSAN

(aside to Walsh)

Where the hell is Marty? He should
be here with the police by now.

Greg stops in his tracks, only a few yards from them. Jack picks up a camera. Greg pulls out his gun.

GREG

Drop it!

JACK

Whoa! Easy there.

Jack slowly lowers the camera onto the table. Making sure it's pointing towards Greg, he presses the shutter release as he does so. The CLICK is audible. Greg looks very angry. He shoots the camera off the table.

GREG

You wanna be a hero and die for a
photo, be my guest. Everybody.
Hands on the table. Now! I want to
see them.

He waves the gun at them. They do as he says.

VERONIKA

(in Russian)

Run, Gregor. They already know
everything. I didn't tell them
anything, I swear.

Greg points the gun at Veronika.

GREG
(in Russian)
You couldn't keep your stupid mouth
shut, could you? I told them you'd
go soft. You and your precious
Yankee baby are dead.

Susan dives at Veronika to push her over as Greg pulls the trigger. The glass wind cheater SHATTERS.

Greg turns and fires again. A bullet grazes Walsh. Blood appears on his arm. He grabs the wound with his other hand, his face screwed up in agony.

Susan grabs Jack's other camera and throws it at Greg. Jack instinctively tries to stop her.

JACK
No!

The camera hits Greg in the face with a THUD. He drops the gun. Susan leaps up and knocks him to the ground.

Greg pushes her off into a nearby table. All the plates, cutlery and glasses fall on top of her.

Greg gets up and looks for the gun. As he bends to grab it, Susan smashes a tray over his head.

SUSAN
You asshole!

Greg drops to his knees. He rubs his head. Susan kicks him in the stomach. He doubles up.

Susan notices she is bleeding. She grabs a napkin from a table and dabs it.

Greg sees the gun again. As he grabs for it, Susan manages to kick it away.

Greg grabs Susan by the leg and forces her to the ground.

GREG
You interfering bitch. Why couldn't
you leave well alone?

He puts his hands around her throat and starts to strangle her. Her face goes beetroot.

Jack pounces on Greg from behind. He knocks Greg off Susan.

Susan COUGHS loudly as she tries to get her breath back. She rubs her throat.

Veronika moves stealthily to reclaim her purse.

Meanwhile, Jack and Greg are tumbling into tables. Table settings are flying in all directions. Eventually, Greg smashes Jack hard against a pillar and he is knocked out.

SUSAN

Jack!

Greg grabs a knife and lunges for Susan. She swerves to avoid him, but slips and falls to the ground, banging her head on the ground. She is momentarily stunned. Greg stands over her and raises the knife.

GREG

You stupid cow. So much planning
and preparation.

He's about to stab downwards when a SHOT rings out. Greg stops. From his expression, he has clearly been hit. He turns as he falls. He sees... Veronika holding her gun.

VERONIKA

(in Russian)

You son of a bitch!

Greg hits the ground.

VERONIKA

(in Russian)

No one threatens my baby!

A dazed Susan slowly gets back onto her feet.

Police cars with WAILING sirens pull up in front of the restaurant. Veronika turns the gun on the others.

VERONIKA

Don't try to stop me. I'm not going
to prison.

SUSAN

What about your baby?

VERONIKA

(tears in her eyes)

Take care of her. I can't-

A SHOT rings out. Susan looks around startled. Greg is holding a gun pointed at Veronika. She drops her gun, and collapses, first onto her knees, then the floor. Blood pours out of her.

A sadistic, satisfied grin crosses Greg's face. In great pain, he slowly turns the gun towards Susan. Instinctively, Susan grabs a knife and throws it at him. It strikes him in the throat. He collapses, dead.

WIDE ANGLE OF SCENE

Mayhem, overturned tables and debris. Unconscious Jack on one side; injured Walsh on another; Greg and Veronika lying dead on the floor; an exhausted Susan propped against a table.

SWAT police swarm in. Susan puts her hands in the air.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM -- EVENING

Press Conference. Although his right arm is in a sling, Walsh has recovered his poise and confidence once again. With him are Lydia Rodriguez, Fred Brown, and a police detective. The room is packed with press and TV journalists.

RODRIGUEZ

... and I am happy to tell you the Walsh/Rodriguez ticket is back on track.

There is strong APPLAUSE.

BROWN

If I may just interject here, Lydia. I want to make sure this point is absolutely clear: Miss Marsden confirmed she and Bill Walsh NEVER had a relationship. The pregnancy was the result of an involuntary medical intervention.

Walsh LAUGHS.

WALSH

Thank you, Fred. Ever the stickler for detail!

PHILIPPE BARR

Philippe Barr, French TV. How did she get the sperm?

WALSH

Long story, which you can read in tomorrow's L.A. Post. Beware, gentlemen - it'll bring tears to your eyes!

INT. WALSH'S LIMO - LATER

Walsh and Brown are in the car, waiting to leave. A messenger hands Walsh an envelope, just before the car pulls away.

CLOSE UP on envelope. Susan's business card is stapled to the corner.

"Extremely Private & Confidential

Senator Walsh's Eyes Only"

Inside the envelope are shredded documents, and a small note.

"Oxford was a long time ago ~ Susan"

INT. TV STUDIO -- EVENING

SIMON STONE, news anchor, is interviewing Susan. Despite the Band-Aids and bruises, she is clearly ecstatic.

SIMON
Congratulations, Susan. Story of
the year - no, the decade.

Susan looks genuinely taken aback.

SIMON
What I don't get is what were the
Russians after?

SUSAN
They wanted America to stay out of
their business. They were spooked
by Senator Walsh's firm stand
against aggression, and his push
for democracy. They had to make
sure their fingerprints weren't
anywhere near this.

SIMON
So they created a baby?

SUSAN
Exactly, Simon. That's the genius
bit. Distraction, and plausible
deniability in one. They didn't
leave anything to chance. They made
sure he got a boost from the
accident, then pulled the rug from
underneath him when it was too late
to recover.

SIMON
Devious, but why didn't they just
assassinate him?

SUSAN
Amazing. That's what everyone asks.
The Law of Unintended Consequences.
This was much more subtle. Who
thought it was anything other than
another randy politician story?

The camera pulls back to reveal the interview on a television set. We are now in...

INT. SUSAN'S FATHER'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Susan's father watches with rapt attention as Susan and Jack bring in some food beers.

SUSAN (ON TV)

They understood the American psyche oh so well, as you can see from the media feeding frenzy that erupted after the baby was born - me included, I have to admit!

Jack picks up the remote and hits mute.

JACK

She did great, wouldn't you agree, Sir? And job offers from virtually every major media outlet on the planet!

FATHER

Actually, that was rather ingenious how you solved that puzzle, Sweetie.

A tear in her eye, Susan gives her father a big hug. Father is a little taken aback, but hugs her back proudly. Jack shakes his head uncomprehendingly.

JACK

Who'd have thought those pictures we took in the house would have rattled Greg so much?

SUSAN

Potential loose end. That's why they had to get them back through the break-ins.

JACK

All my fault - story of my life!

SUSAN

You're such a liability!

Jack spots a notification on Susan's laptop screen.

JACK

Hang on. You've got an email from Moscow. Subject: Gregor Karpov. Shall I?

SUSAN

Sure. Go ahead.

Jack opens the mail.

JACK
Complete biography, yadda yadda
yadda. There's a picture
attachment.

He clicks on the icon for the attachment. It opens and a picture of a middle-aged Russian doctor appears.

SUSAN
But that's not...

They look at each other quizzically.

JACK
Then, who was...?

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON DC -- MORNING

AERIAL SHOT OF THE MALL

The Inauguration of President Walsh. A cold January day. Snow on the ground. Everyone is dressed warm. Walsh is standing with his right arm raised, taking the oath in front of the Chief Justice. Jane is standing at his side. She looks proud. Nearby is Lydia Rodriguez.

The camera pans the stage holding the dignitaries. Susan and Jack are visible at the back of the pack. We see the Walsh boys in a more prominent position, very smart in suits, and clearly proud of their father. The camera lingers a moment.

Then we see their sister, Elizabeth... holding baby Alexandra.

FADE OUT: