

THE BACK DOOR

Written by

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EXT. WILLITS STAR REAR PARKING LOT - DAY

GENESSA THODE (20) emerges from her Geo Metro doing her impression of an over-caffeinated, big-city journalist. She walks crisply across the dirt lot to the rear entrance of the Willits Star newspaper and presses a button by the door.

Many decades ago this small-town rag was the heartbeat of the Willits community. Now it's an anachronism, crammed with ads and fluff. But to Genessa, it's her doorway to something big.

After waiting and pressing the button multiple times, a gruff old guy, PHIL (50s), opens the door.

PHIL

Yeah?

GENESSA

(With enthusiasm)

I'm Genessa Thode. I have a job interview with Mr. Delot.

PHIL

You mean Franklin Deloit?

GENESSA

(Checking a note)

Yes.

PHIL

This is the back door. You'll need to go around to the front.

GENESSA

Oh sorry.

He rolls his eyes and closes the door.

Unfazed, she makes her way down a dirt driveway between buildings to the sidewalk and what is obviously the entrance.

INT. WILLITS STAR WAITING AREA - DAY

The newspaper office is in a two-story storefront in the old downtown strip - one large room with about 10 cubicles, but only 3 to 4 people present.

Genessa approaches a person who appears to be the receptionist. After a moment, GRACE (50s) looks up from her computer. She too is gruff and annoyed.

GRACE

Yes?

CONTINUED:

GENESSA
I have a job interview with Mr.
Deloit.

Grace checks across the room, and then picks up the phone and dials. We hear it RINGING.

GRACE
(Into phone)
You expecting someone?

Distant MUMBLING.

GRACE (CONT'D)
(To Genessa)
What's your name?

GENESSA
(Crisply)
Genessa Thode.

GRACE
(Into phone)
You got that?

Distant MUMBLING. Grace hangs up.

GRACE (CONT'D)
He'll be right with you.

She goes back to her computer. Genessa looks for a place to sit. Nothing. After a while, a VOICE from across the room...

DELOIT (O.S.)
Genessa, come on over.

She immediately makes her way through the maze of empty cubicle desks to...

DELOIT'S DESK - CONTINUOUS

He stands as she approaches him with a big plastered-on smile. She's over-prepared, on fire, giving it her all, convinced this could be the defining moment of her life. Deloit is thinking about lunch.

She reaches out a clammy hand and grabs onto his with maybe a bit too much enthusiasm.

GENESSA
Genessa Thode. Nice to meet you.

CONTINUED:

DELOIT

How you doing? Franklin Deloit.
Have a seat.

They sit.

DELOIT (CONT'D)

(Looking over her
paperwork)

So you want to be in the newspaper
business, huh?

GENESSA

(Extremely optimistic)

Oh, yes.

DELOIT

Well, this is it.

As he continues to peruse her paperwork, she glances around the small, dusty room, trying to imagine how this could be the place where all the magic is made.

DELOIT (CONT'D)

How long do we have you?

GENESSA

An internship is two months. But of
course, I'm available to-

DELOIT

Good. We can always use an extra
hand. Still going to the community
college?

GENESSA

Yes, but just at night. I plan to-

DELOIT

Good. Why don't you take that desk
over there.

He stands. She stands. He indicates a sad, empty cubicle. She's confused.

DELOIT (CONT'D)

Looks like Dick's out now. When he
comes back I'll have him give you
an assignment.

He sits and goes back to his computer. She waits for more information, some kind of proclamation. Doesn't get any. She heads for the desk he pointed to.

GENESSA'S DESK - CONTINUOUS

She sits, not sure what to do. Switches on an antique computer. It CLATTERS and WHEEZES. She discreetly looks through the drawers. They're mostly empty, except for a desk nameplate, reading "Rox Campbell," an almost-empty box of Kleenex and a gag Pulitzer trophy, "You got it, Rox."

Grace's phone RINGS and Genessa looks up. She can't hear the conversation, but can see clearly that it's about her. She watches as Grace hangs up and walks across the room to Deloit. She relays something to him, indicating Genessa. Then, she returns to her desk and Deloit stands.

DELOIT

(To Genessa)

Hey, uh, come over here for a sec.

Genessa approaches him, not sure what to expect. Her community college training has left her woefully unprepared.

DELOIT'S DESK - CONTINUOUS

DELOIT

Looks like Dick's going to be out for a while. But he wants you to check on something for him. Okay?

GENESSA

Sure.

DELOIT

He's doing a story on that new federal building that's going up at the north end of town. You know where that is?

GENESSA

Um...

DELOIT

It's just a dirt lot with a fence around it now.

GENESSA

Oh yeah. I think...

DELOIT

Anyway, find out what you can about it. He'll be back tomorrow.

GENESSA

Okay.

CONTINUED:

Deloit goes back to his computer. She waits. Nothing. She's approaching a meltdown.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Um, excuse me. What, uh... Where do I... Is there a...

DELOIT

(Not looking up)

Drive out there. Check it out. See if there are any signs, like with names and phone numbers.

(She's still there)

Write them down. Take a picture with your cell phone. Whatever. Come back here. You know?

(She doesn't)

You got a computer. You know how to use a computer, right?

GENESSA

Oh yes.

DELOIT

Okay. Use it to look stuff up.

He goes back to his work. She's still not getting it. She starts to shake a bit, get a little weepy. After a moment, he turns to her.

DELOIT (CONT'D)

Have a seat. Look... um, I forgot your name, sorry...

GENESSA

Genessa Tho-

Deloit tries to channel some distant remnant of his journalistic roots.

DELOIT

Look Genessa, the number one rule of the newspaper business is you gotta figure stuff out. Okay? That's what journalism is all about - you figure stuff out so the readers don't have to.

(She nods)

If the readers could figure stuff out, they wouldn't need us, right?

GENESSA

I see. Yes.

CONTINUED: (2)

It's an "aha" moment, a transformation. Her eyes grow wide. She's getting it!

DELOIT

Good. So get to work. This is your assignment. If you can't do it, Dick will do it, but then we don't need you.

GENESSA

Oh, I can do it. That's not the uh-

DELOIT

Good.

He goes back to his work. She stands. She's ready. She's a journalist!

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Genessa is parked on an empty road next to a large dirt lot surrounded by a tall chain link fence. She gets out of her car and looks around. Nothing. No people, no cars or trucks or building materials, just a sign.

She walks over to the sign and takes a picture with her cell phone - Roban Construction. Then, she takes another shot of the dirt lot.

INT. WILLITS STAR BY GENESSA'S DESK - DAY

She has Googled Roban construction and is dialing the number on the web site, nervous about her first encounter as a journalist. Her lips move as she rehearses what she is going to say.

ROBAN RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)

Roban Construction. How may I direct your call?

GENESSA

Hello, I'm Genessa Thode from the Willits Star newspaper. I'm-

ROBAN RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)

One moment please.

Distorted HOLD MUSIC crackles on. Then, ED WALTERS comes in chirpy and ready to handle the press.

CONTINUED:

WALTERS (V.O.)

Hello, this is Ed Walters. How may I help you?

GENESSA

I'm Genessa Thode from the Willits Star in... in Willits, California, and I'm looking for information about a building... you're building here... North of town. A federal-

WALTERS (V.O.)

Ah yes. Let me check something. Just a sec.

HOLD MUSIC. She exhales.

WALTERS (V.O.)

You still there? Sorry for the delay. Did you say Willits?

GENESSA

Yes.

WALTERS (V.O.)

Ah. That would be a structure we are building for the federal government.

GENESSA

(After waiting)

What is... Sort of is it... going to-

WALTERS (V.O.)

I'm sorry. That's all the information I have on it. You'll have to contact the federal government for more details.

GENESSA

Can you tell me... a number or name or...

WALTERS (V.O.)

Sorry. We're just the contractor. As you know we can't give out that information.

GENESSA

Oh, right. Of course. Okay then. Thank you.

CONTINUED: (2)

She hangs up, collects herself, not sure what to do next. She Looks back at Deloit. He's busy on the phone. Not wanting to exercise him again, she Googles federal government. Scrolls through a page of useless links.

Then, she looks around the desk and sees an old rolodex device. She thumbs through the cards. Behind a card labeled "Federal" is a piece of folded paper. She opens it. Inside is a note, "Fed Gov't White House guy" and a phone number beginning with "202."

Short on options and clearly out of her element, she gives it a shot. The phone picks up immediately.

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
(Furtive, angry)
Yeah.

The guy is in a chronic state of high anxiety - short-tempered, self-absorbed, about to explode.

GENESSA
(Thrown off)
Oh, hi. I'm not sure... I'm looking for-

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
How did you get this number?

GENESSA
I'm sorry?

BEAT.

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
Well?

GENESSA
I'm calling from Willits,
California.

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
I know. I can see. Who is this?

GENESSA
Um. Genessa Thode.

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
How did you get this number?

GENESSA
I was... Uh, it's the number in
the... thing...

CONTINUED: (3)

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
Never mind. You know the deal,
right?

GENESSA
Uh, yeah. I'm just looking for
information about the building
you're building-

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
You'll get it. All of it.

GENESSA
All of it?

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
You have no idea. No idea! It goes
all the way to the top.

GENESSA
The top? I don't-

WHITE HOUSE GUY (V.O.)
Gotta go. I got your number. Don't
tell anybody we talked. Seriously.
You got it? And don't call me
again. It's too dangerous. I'll get
in touch with YOU.

The phone CLICKS OFF. She's stunned, hangs up.

DELOIT
Well?

She jumps. Deloit is standing right behind her.

GENESSA
Oh hi.

DELOIT
Find out anything about the
building?

GENESSA
Yes and no.

DELOIT
What's that mean?

GENESSA
I called the construction company
and they said it's going to be a
federal building.

CONTINUED: (4)

DELOIT

We already know that.

GENESSA

Right. Then, I called the White House and they said I'd be getting the information about it. All of it.

DELOIT

Wait a minute. You called what?

GENESSA

The Federal Government White House.

DELOIT

Why did you call the White House?

GENESSA

I thought it would be a good place to start.

DELOIT

No, you don't just call the White House.

GENESSA

But the guy said...

DELOIT

Who?

GENESSA

He didn't say.

DELOIT

What did he tell you?

GENESSA

You know. I probably shouldn't say.

DELOIT

Listen, um... what was your name again?

GENESSA

Genessa Th-.

DELOIT

Genessa, please don't take this the wrong way, but I think I may have overestimated your capabilities. It's my fault.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (5)

DELOIT (CONT'D)

I'm glad you took the initiative and all, but let's wait for Dick to come back before you try any more things on your own. This should be a very simple-

GENESSA

I did what you told me to do and I'm getting the information you want.

DELOIT

But the White House. I mean that's...

GENESSA

I just need a little time. He said he'd get in touch with me.

DELOIT

The guy from the White House.

GENESSA

And get me the information.

DELOIT

Okay, whatever. Why don't you take the rest of the day off-

GENESSA

(Approaching another
meltdown)

I'm sorry. I thought you'd be happy.

DELOIT

I am. Dick should be in tomorrow and he can follow up. Thanks.

He heads back to his desk. She's crestfallen, her first day as a journalist a disaster.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

It's late, dark and empty. Genessa's Geo Metro drives up and parks off the road across from the site.

INT. GENESSA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

She shuts off the engine. All is quiet. The only light comes from a temporary streetlight hanging over a wide gate.

CONTINUED:

She's come looking for answers, but hasn't got a clue where to start. She unwraps a burrito and takes a bite. Opens the door and gets out.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - CONTINUOUS

She crosses the street and walks along the fence, looking for some clue on the other side. The fence is substantial, overkill for an empty dirt lot. She RATTLES it. It's new, clean and anchored firmly in cement footings.

She shrugs, walks back to her car. When she gets there, she looks up just as an unmarked white van roars by and stops at the gate.

She scrambles into the car.

INT. GENESSA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Safely inside, she hunkers down in the seat and watches.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - CONTINUOUS

A guy hops out of the passenger side and unlocks the gate. Then, the van drives through and stops just outside the area illuminated by the streetlight.

More men, maybe 4 or 5, emerge from the backseat and meet at the back of the van. One of them opens the rear door and hands small electronic boxes to each man.

Each man then lifts the lid on his box and reaches in. Dim greenish lights flash on. They pull out wired probes. Then, they fan out and move methodically around the lot, staring at the light as they track something with the probes.

Genessa watches the activity, afraid to move.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - MORNING

The morning light burns through the thick fog. The site is empty, the gate locked.

INT. GENESSA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

A passing semi startles her awake. She rubs her eyes and looks out the windshield. Then, she gets out, followed by a few empty burrito wrappers.

CONTINUED:

She scans the lot for any evidence of the activity she witnessed. There is none. Not even a footprint.

INT. WILLIE'S CAFÉ - MORNING

She's drinking coffee and looking through pictures she took with her cell phone camera. The only thing visible is the area under the streetlight, a total loss. All the mysterious men and their boxes are in shadow.

A waiter HUDSON (20) approaches with an omelet. He's a tall, gangly kid - a close childhood friend, who's more like a brother.

HUDSON
What's that?

GENESSA
(Not bothering to look up)
Oh, nothing.

HUDSON
Let me see.

He sets the omelet in front of her.

GENESSA
It's an empty lot. Look.

She flashes the screen at him, then immediately turns it away.

HUDSON
What's that about?

GENESSA
(Offhandedly)
It's for a story I'm doing.

HUDSON
A story?

GENESSA
For the Star. I got a job interning
at the Star.

She tries to underplay it, hoping he'll lose interest and leave.

HUDSON
(News to him)
You're doing a story about an empty
lot?

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

Look. I can't really talk about it.

She locks her phone and starts eating. He sits across from her.

HUDSON

Whatever. I didn't see you in class last night.

GENESSA

Yeah, I was busy.

HUDSON

On that story?

GENESSA

I guess.

He hates the game she's playing and explodes in his own inexplosive way.

HUDSON

Listen, what's going on? How come you're blowing me off all of a sudden? I have a right to know.

GENESSA

I'm not and no, you don't.

HUDSON

Are you seeing someone else?

GENESSA

No Hudson. I'm not cheating on you.

HUDSON

Then, what?

GENESSA

You wouldn't understand.

HUDSON

What? Understand what? Give me a clue!

GENESSA

(Exasperated)
Okay. What am I?

HUDSON

I don't know. What do you mean?

CONTINUED: (2)

GENESSA

You don't know. That's the problem.

HUDSON

What am I supposed to say? It's a trick question.

GENESSA

Tell me what you think I am.

HUDSON

I think you're a girl... a person. I don't know. What do you want me-

GENESSA

Hudson, I'm a journalist.

HUDSON

A journalist. Okay. You're a journalist.

GENESSA

I'm not cheating on you and I don't dislike you, necessarily. I just don't have time for you because I'm a journalist, and that requires a lot of time.

HUDSON

(Deeply hurt but still
punching)

Okay. I understand. You're busy.

GENESSA

With my career. Sorry.

HUDSON

I want to be a journalist too. You know that. Why can't we both be journalists?

GENESSA

Hudson, we can. But to be honest I see you more at home, you know, here. I just can't picture you actually being a journalist and traveling the world, and applying yourself.

She looks at his lost sorrowful eyes.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Never mind. I'm sorry.

CONTINUED: (3)

HUDSON
I can apply myself.

GENESSA
I know. I'm sorry.

HUDSON
So that's it?

GENESSA
Hudson-

HUDSON
I can't believe it. We've been
friends since like second grade.

GENESSA
We're still friends.

HUDSON
But you're blowing me off.

GENESSA
No, I'm not. Did you listen to what
I said? Did you listen to anything?

HUDSON
Yeah.

GENESSA
What?

HUDSON
Um, you're a journalist.

GENESSA
Right. I'm not a kid in second
grade anymore. Things have changed.

He just stares at her, mouth ajar.

INT. WILLITS STAR BY GENESSA'S DESK - DAY

Carefully formatted notes scroll by on a computer screen.

DICK (O.S.)
Good. You got this from the GSA in
San Francisco, right?

GENESSA (O.S.)
Right.

CONTINUED:

DICK FIRKS (60s) is reviewing her notes at his desk near Genessa's. He's well past his prime - always looks like he doesn't want to be wherever he is. Genessa is sitting at her desk waiting for the verdict.

DICK

Get a quote from the mayor and then give me 200 words by five today.

He shuts off his computer screen and starts to put on his jacket.

GENESSA

Is there a number for the-

DICK

(On his way out)

Check the contacts on the computer. I'll be back around five.

GENESSA

What about... What if I... but I might...

DICK

And leave out all that stuff about the White House, please.

GENESSA

But-

DICK

You'll be fine.

He's gone. She looks toward Deloit's desk. He's gone too. She sits and stares at her blank antique computer screen, clicks something and gets an error message.

INT. CITY HALL - DAY

As she walks down a long hall looking at names on the doors. She comes to one that reads, "Mayor's Office", and goes in.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE RECEPTION - DAY

She approaches the assistant in her usual state of anxiety and confusion.

GENESSA

Hi, I'm Genessa Thode from the Willits Star. Is the mayor in?

CONTINUED:

MAYOR'S ASST.

Do you have an appointment?

GENESSA

No, I'm from the Willits-

MAYOR'S ASST.

I haven't seen you before.

GENESSA

I'm got an intern. I'm an intern
for the Willits-

MAYOR'S ASST.

You should've made an appointment.

GENESSA

I didn't. I couldn't. I'm sorry.
The number was-

MAYOR'S ASST.

I'll see if she has some time. Have
a seat.

She sits, exhales. The assistant goes through a door behind her into the mayor's office. A moment later, she returns.

MAYOR'S ASST. (CONT'D)

Is this going to take long? She
only has a few minutes.

GENESSA

No, no. Just a few-

MAYOR'S ASST.

Go on in.

Genessa braces herself and enters.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

JUNE BETCH (60) the small, round mayor, is seated behind a large desk in a small, crowded office. She stands, smiles, extends her hand. Genessa is in awe.

BETCH

Hi. June Betch. I don't think I
know you.

GENESSA

(Shaking her hand)
I'm an intern.

CONTINUED:

BETCH

(Waits)

And your name?

GENESSA

Sorry. Genessa Thode. I'm with the Willits, uh...

BETCH

(She waits)

Are you doing a story for the paper?

GENESSA

Yes.

BETCH

Have a seat.

(Another wait)

What do you need?

GENESSA

I'm writing a story about the new building, the federal in the dirt at the end of town over there. And uh...

BETCH

(Waiting)

Are you looking for a quote?

GENESSA

Yes, please.

BETCH

Okay.

Genessa gets out a pad of paper. Betch waits until she is settled. Then, she dictates...

BETCH (CONT'D)

We are very glad that the federal government chose Willits for its new building. It will bring government services to the area like Social Security and Medicare, as well as provide jobs for nearly 200 people. Most of all we are very happy because the facility will help our ailing local economy recover from the current downturn.

Done. Genessa finishes writing and looks up.

CONTINUED: (2)

GENESSA

Great. That should do fine. Thank you.

They stands.

BETCH

You know, next time you can just call or shoot me an e-mail. That might be easier.

GENESSA

I'm sorry I couldn't find the number in the computer. And I'm new and-

BETCH

No problem. Take a card.

She points to business cards in a holder. Genessa takes one.

GENESSA

(Duh)

Ah, good idea. Thank you.

BETCH

So, is there anything else you need?

GENESSA

No, thank you.

They shake. Betch sits as Genessa reaches for the door. Then, she stops and turns back.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Actually, I do have one more question.

BETCH

Okay.

GENESSA

I talked with a man on the phone yesterday. And... I don't know who he was, exactly. But, he sounded very frightened and said things that led me to believe that something else was going on there that was, I don't know, frightening.

Betch freezes, her expression stiffens.

CONTINUED: (3)

BETCH

What did he tell you?

GENESSA

He couldn't... He had to go, but he said he'd be in touch and then hung up.

Silence.

BETCH

Well, I don't know. I told you all I know. Of course, it's not my place to know about everything the federal government is doing.

GENESSA

I'm sure it's... And last night...

(BEAT)

Never mind. I'm sure it's nothing.

BETCH

(Taking it seriously)

Let me know if you hear any more, okay?

GENESSA

Sure.

BETCH

I mean that.

Their eyes meet for an uncomfortably long time.

EXT. WILLITS DOWNTOWN - DAY

As Genessa walks down the sidewalk with her legal pad under her arm, taking bites of a corndog dripping with mustard. A black Ford SUV pulls up close and tails her.

She hears something and turns back. Then, she stops. The SUV picks up speed and passes her. And as it does WE see a camera pointing at her from the passenger window.

She freezes with mustard dripping from her open mouth.

INT. WILLITS STAR WAITING AREA - DAY

Genessa blows in. She quickly closes the door behind her and searches out the window. When she's convinced no one is following her, she turns in and there's Grace staring at her.

CONTINUED:

GRACE
Everything okay?

GENESSA
Yeah. It was just, uh... Nothing.

Genessa heads toward her desk. Grace shakes her head and goes back to work.

INT. WILLITS STAR BY GENESSA'S DESK - LATE AFTERNOON

Genessa is completely engaged as she finishes typing the story. She checks the word count - 200 exactly. Grace breaks the silence. Genessa jumps.

GRACE
Hey, uh, Genessa. You going to be much longer?

GENESSA
No. I just finished actually.

GRACE
Good. I'm going to take off. When you leave, just close the door and it'll lock behind you.

Grace heads for the door, as she puts on her coat. Genessa stands.

GENESSA
Okay, uh, what do I... Is everybody's gone... do I need to do... anything.

She stops. Grace is already out the door and can be seen through the front window scurrying down the sidewalk. It's growing dark. Genessa looks around, comes to the realization that everyone has gone and left her alone in the office.

She looks up at the clock - 6:30 PM. She has worked past her deadline, Dick never came back, and there she is.

She sits back down, not sure what to do next. She turns off her computer. It becomes very quiet. She gets up and puts on her coat. The phone RINGS.

She looks at the caller ID. It's blank. A second RING. She hesitates, then picks up.

GENESSA (CONT'D)
Hello.

CONTINUED:

No answer, just background NOISE. After a moment, a CLICK.
Then, DIAL TONE.

Genessa hangs up quickly and stares at the phone.

She picks up again, then thinks twice and hangs up. She pulls
out her cell phone and dials.

GENESSA (CONT'D)
Hi, Hudson?

HUDSON (V.O.)
Genessa?

GENESSA
Can you do me a favor?

INT. HUDSON'S PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

He and Genessa are driving in SILENCE. She's tense about
something and he's afraid to say anything that'll set her off
again. After a long silence, he tests the water...

HUDSON
(Tenuous)
So...

GENESSA
Can you just take me home?

HUDSON
Sure. Are you all right?

GENESSA
Yeah.

HUDSON
Something wrong with your car?

GENESSA
Uh, yeah.

HUDSON
I got triple A. I can call them if
you want. It's free.

GENESSA
The car's okay, actually. It's
something else.

HUDSON
Okay. Sure you're all right? You
seem kind of...

CONTINUED:

GENESSA
(Getting a little steamed)
I need to think. I just need to
think. Okay?

HUDSON
Okay.

EXT. GENESSA'S DUPLEX - NIGHT

The truck pulls into a parking space and the two get out and walk to the front door.

Before Genessa can fish the keys from her purse, Hudson reaches out and opens the door. Genessa drops the keys and grabs his arm. He turns to her and smiles.

GENESSA
What did you do?

HUDSON
Nothing.

GENESSA
The door should be locked.

HUDSON
Oh.

INT. GENESSA'S DUPLEX - CONTINUOUS

She steps cautiously into the dark room and turns on a lamp. Hudson follows her in. She scans the room, then SHUSHES Hudson and points to the open bedroom door.

Hudson goes to the dark room and turns on the ceiling light. He walks in hesitantly, followed by Genessa. Nothing appears to be out of place. He turns to her and shrugs. She points out the door.

He goes to the kitchen, turns on a light.

HUDSON
(Whispering)
I don't see anything.

She turns to a desk under the front window in the living room. Checks around her laptop for anything unusual. Then, picks up a hard drive with a wire dangling from it.

CONTINUED:

GENESSA
(Very serious)
This was plugged in this morning
when I left.

HUDSON
Are you sure?

GENESSA
Definitely. I used it to copy
pictures off my cell phone. It was
definitely plugged in.

She begins to shiver.

HUDSON
What's going on? You got to tell
me. Are you in trouble?

She nods.

He takes the hard drive from her and checks out the cable.
She starts to weep and grabs his arm. He sets the hard drive
down and holds her.

INT. HUDSON'S PICKUP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

As they drive down a dark road. They're not talking again.
Finally...

GENESSA
I really appreciate this.

HUDSON
It's okay. Don't even think about
it. You can take my bed. I'll sleep
on the couch. The bed should be
clean - pretty clean.

GENESSA
You don't have to do that.

HUDSON
I don't mind. Really. I want to.

She SIGHS.

HUDSON (CONT'D)
I mean that.

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

Listen, I think I'd better tell you what's been going on in case something weird happens.

HUDSON

Yeah, tell me.

GENESSA

It's serious. You have to take it seriously. Do you promise?

HUDSON

Of course.

GENESSA

I don't know if I can trust you.

HUDSON

You can trust me.

GENESSA

It's not a game, okay? It's real.

HUDSON

I get it. Tell me.

GENESSA

I called the White House yesterday, and talked to a very weird guy. He said he was going to send me some information about that dirt lot at the north end of town. Then, he hung up and all this weird stuff started happening.

HUDSON

Wow.

There's silence as he tries to process.

GENESSA

So that's it, basically.

HUDSON

I have a question.

GENESSA

What?

HUDSON

Why did you call the White House?

INT. HUDSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As the front door opens and Hudson enters followed by Genessa, carrying a small suitcase and her laptop. TINA Hudson's mom is seated in the center of a saggy old couch, flanked by two small kids. The three are watching something engrossing on TV.

HUDSON

Hi mom.

TINA

Hi. Genessa? Haven't seen you in a while. How have you been?

GENESSA

Good.

HUDSON

She's going to stay here tonight.

TINA

Oh? Okay.

GENESSA

My heater broke.

HUDSON

Yeah, I think it's the pilot.

GENESSA

And it's cold, so...

TINA

Have you had any dinner? There's some mac and cheese on the stove.

GENESSA

That's okay. I'm not that hungry.

TINA

I can make you some eggs or cereal. We have Fruit Loops, toast. If I'd known you were coming, I'd have made some meatloaf. We usually have that on Thursday, but I could've-

HUDSON

Mom, I'm sleeping on the couch.

GENESSA

No, no. I got the couch.

CONTINUED:

TINA

I think there's some pizza left.

They start walking down the short hall to his bedroom.

HUDSON

I love the couch.

GENESSA

So do I.

HUDSON

I love it more than you do.

GENESSA

I don't think so.

HUDSON

You have no choice.

GENESSA

Yes, I do.

HUDSON

Okay, you can sleep there if you want, but it's going to get pretty crowded with the two of us.

INT. HUDSON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

As they enter. The articles in the room haven't changed much since second grade. Genessa winces when she sees the bed.

HUDSON

I'll change the sheets.

GENESSA

I'd appreciate that.

INT. WILLITS STAR BY GENESSA'S DESK - NEXT DAY

Genessa is seated watching Dick read her article on his computer. He finishes.

DICK

Good. We'll get it in the next issue. I want you to head over to Lucerne this afternoon and cover a game at the high school. Ever done sports?

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

Well, some.

DICK

Basketball?

GENESSA

Sure. I guess.

DICK

You'll pick it up. Got a camera?

GENESSA

Sure.

Dick stands and starts to put on his coat.

DICK

Give me 200 words by...

(Calls to Grace)

Hey Grace, when's the deadline?

GRACE

No later than 11.

DICK

(To Genessa)

Nine. And you'll need this.

He grabs something out of a drawer and tosses it to Genessa.

DICK (CONT'D)

Use that press pass to get in. That way you don't have to pay. But before you go, Grace has some classifieds for you to edit. Ever done that?

GENESSA

(Overwhelmed)

Not really.

On his way out.

DICK

You'll pick it up. We need pictures too. Did I say that?

GENESSA

For the game?

DICK

Very important. Watch the contrast.

CONTINUED: (2)

Gone. As usual, Genessa is lost.

GENESSA
Grace?

GRACE
Yeah?

GENESSA
Never mind.

Genessa is ticked, mumbles "watch the contrast" under her breath.

INT. WILLIE'S CAFE - DAY

It's the lunch rush. Hudson is busy with 4 or 5 tables. He refills coffee, then moves to the next booth, sets the coffee urn down and pulls out his order pad.

HUDSON
Have you decided?

GUY IN BOOTH
How are your cheeseburgers?

HUDSON
They're a quarter pound, beef, cheese. You know. Just regular-

GUY IN BOOTH
Good. Listen very carefully. Keep writing like you're taking my order. Don't look around. Two guys are watching you. If they see you trying to find them, they'll know who you and I are and they'll kill us. Understand?

It's the White House Guy. Hudson's heart starts racing.

HUDSON
Yes.

GUY IN BOOTH
I'm going to place something in my menu. I want you to give it to your girl friend at the newspaper. Tell her it has the information she's been looking for. The two guys watching us must not see what we're doing. Do you understand?

CONTINUED:

HUDSON

Yes.

(Staying in character)

Will there be anything else?

GUY IN BOOTH

Bring me a cheeseburger and coffee.

That should do it, thank you.

The guy places the object in the menu and closes it. Hudson carries the menu behind the counter. Then, goes through the swinging doors into the kitchen.

INT. WILLIE'S CAFE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He gives the order to the cook, then runs to a secluded corner and carefully opens the menu. It's a small SD card. He fumbles around trying to figure out what to do with it. He pulls out his wallet and carefully places it between a stack of cards.

Then, he pulls out his cell phone and dials.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WILLIAMS STAR BY GENESSA'S DESK - CONTINUOUS

Genessa is editing classified ads, as her cell phone RINGS.

GENESSA

(On phone)

Hi.

HUDSON

(On phone, highly agitated)

We have to meet. I get off in an hour.

Genessa stiffens, sensing his urgent tone.

GENESSA

But, I'm working. I can't just-

HUDSON

Your guy, the White House guy, he's here now, in the café.

GENESSA

(Gripped)

Holy crap.

CONTINUED:

HUDSON

He gave me, uh, one of those SD cards that has the stuff you want.

GENESSA

Why did he give it to you?

HUDSON

I don't know. I don't know. All I know is there are some guys out there watching me and they'll kill me if they know I have it.

GENESSA

How do you know?

HUDSON

Your guy told me.

GENESSA

(Mind racing)

Okay, okay. Let me think. You can't act suspicious.

HUDSON

I know that.

GENESSA

Okay, wait. Let me-

HUDSON

I'm calling the cops.

GENESSA

No, no! Those guys. They might be the cops.

HUDSON

How do you know?

GENESSA

Or the FBI or I don't know. The card has something on it they don't want us to see, right?

HUDSON

I guess.

GENESSA

So, you have to act like nothing happened. It's just another day at the office.

CONTINUED: (2)

HUDSON

Right.

GENESSA

And don't panic.

HUDSON

Too late.

GENESSA

Calm down. Are you calm? Don't go out there if you're not calm.

HUDSON

Right. I'm calm.

GENESSA

Work your normal shift, just like nothing happened, and come pick me up. Got it?

HUDSON

Yeah. I better go back to work or they'll suspect something.

GENESSA

Right. Go. See you in an hour.

INT. WILLIE'S CAFE - CONTINUOUS

Hudson hangs up. Then, he runs to the swinging door and opens it a crack. The guy is still there.

He enters from the kitchen, grabs a coffee mug and urn and takes them to the guy's booth. He sets the mug down and pours coffee with a shaky hand. The guy grabs his wrist.

GUY IN BOOTH

(Tense)

Relax.

Hudson goes to another table.

HUDSON

More coffee?

CUSTOMER

Just the check, please.

Hudson looks up out of the corner of his eye as two strange men at the other end of the café get up and walk out.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. HUDSON'S PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

As the passenger door flies open and Genessa gets in with her laptop.

She closes the door.

GENESSA
Start driving.

He guns the engine and pulls away from the curb.

GENESSA (CONT'D)
Wait, turn around. We need to go
that way.

HUDSON
Why?

GENESSA
Just do it.

He makes a U-turn in the middle of the highway and steps on it.

HUDSON
Where we going?

GENESSA
Lucerne.

She starts her laptop.

HUDSON
Why?

GENESSA
Do you have enough gas? I'll pay
you back.

HUDSON
That's okay.

GENESSA
Where is it?

HUDSON
What?

GENESSA
It!

He pulls out his wallet and hands it to her. She starts rifling through it.

CONTINUED:

HUDSON

I stuck it between some papers.

She finds his drivers license and smiles.

GENESSA

Gawd, you look like a fucking serial killer.

HUDSON

Thanks.

She stuffs it back in and continues pulling things out. There it is. Her hands are shaking as she snaps open the case and carefully removes the card. Then, she sticks it in the reader in her laptop.

GENESSA

What did he tell you?

HUDSON

Not much. He said it's what you're looking for. That's all.

GENESSA

And what about those guys?

HUDSON

I may have seen them. I don't know for sure.

GENESSA

Do you think they'll follow us?

HUDSON

I would if I were them.

She opens file explorer on the laptop.

GENESSA

Jesus. There's like 43 gigabytes of stuff. It looks like it's all email and some documents and pictures.

ANGLE on her computer as she clicks through pictures containing building plans.

HUDSON

What is it?

GENESSA

I don't know. But it's a whole lot more than I asked for.

EXT. HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

A plain rental sedan approaches US on a different highway. Then, pulls off on to the shoulder and skids to a stop.

INT. RENTAL SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

The White House guy is on speaker phone, over-caffeinated and paranoid, as usual.

WHITE HOUSE GUY

(Into car mic)

Wait. What? You what? What did you do?

MAN ON PHONE (V.O.)

I was waiting for your call. You never called.

WHITE HOUSE GUY

I never called? The arrangement was for you to call me. Then, I would contact you and hand off the files.

MAN ON PHONE (V.O.)

How could we do that?

WHITE HOUSE GUY

What do you mean?

MAN ON PHONE (V.O.)

You never gave us your number.

WHITE HOUSE GUY

I did and you called. How could you call if you didn't have my number?

MAN ON PHONE (V.O.)

We couldn't, obviously.

WHITE HOUSE GUY

Fuck!

MAN ON PHONE (V.O.)

What did you do?

WHITE HOUSE GUY

I handed off the files. I got the call and I handed them off.

MAN ON PHONE (V.O.)

To whom did you hand them?

CONTINUED:

He sees his life pass before his eyes.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The sedan spins around and heads in the opposite direction at a high speed.

EXT. LUCERNE HIGH - NIGHT

Large hand-painted banners announce the sporting event of the season, the big play-off game. A long line of excited kids winds all the way from the jammed parking lot to the gym.

Genessa holds her laptop carefully under her arm, as she and Hudson push through the crowd to get to the entrance. She flashes her press pass and the ticket taker waves them through.

HUDSON

Do you know what you're doing?

GENESSA

Haven't a clue.

INT. LUCERNE GYM - CONTINUOUS

The flow of the crowd moves them into the court area. Genessa spots a sign on the other side that reads "Press" hanging from a long table in front of the bleachers. She points and they head for it.

INT. LUCERNE GYM PRESS TABLE - CONTINUOUS

They sit on the bench behind the table, and Genessa opens her laptop and starts checking the files. MASON (17), a geeky student, slides over to them.

MASON

Hey, are you guys from the press?

HUDSON

Yeah, she, we're from Willits, the Star, you know, Willits Star.

MASON

Oh yeah? I'm Mason from the school paper, Badger Times.

He shakes hands with Hudson, while Genessa stays riveted on the laptop.

CONTINUED:

MASON (CONT'D)

I haven't seen you before. That other guy, the old one, I see him mostly.

HUDSON

(Confused)

Yeah, I don't know.

He doesn't know where to look.

MASON

Cool. If you need anything, I can hook you up. Clemmons. He's the one to watch. He's going to kick some Bobcat ass. You'll see. We're going to make fucking history tonight. Have you been following the Badgers at all?

HUDSON

Huh? No, I haven't.

MASON

Only down one game, favored to win. I'm surprised you haven't heard.

HUDSON

Well, this isn't our usual... uh beat.

Suddenly, Genessa jumps and grabs Hudson.

GENESSA

Holy shit. Look at this.

HUDSON

What?

GENESSA

(Quietly to Hudson)

It talks about the facility in Willits. That's got to be the new building. Something about Big Sweep.

HUDSON

Big sheep?

GENESSA

Sweep, sweep. Something mining technology for capturing telecommunication assets on the west coast. Sweeping the assets.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

GENESSA (CONT'D)
Capture and filter. It's all technical, I don't know what it means. It's like, fuck. I'm making a copy.

She starts copying the card.

HUDSON
What should we do?

GENESSA
(Jumping out of her skin)
We, uh, we can't stay here. This is really big. We really have some really big things.

HUDSON
Where?

GENESSA
I don't know. But this is wrong, the wrong place.

HUDSON
I agree. Why, why are we here exactly?

GENESSA
I'm supposed to cover the game.

HUDSON
But you don't know anything about basketball.

GENESSA
Is that what this is?

The BUZZER goes off and the game begins. In an instant, the players are right in front of them. They're trapped. And it gets very loud with the crowd shouting and shoes pounding on the court.

MASON
(Shouting to Hudson)
Check out 36 and 12! They're fucking awesome.

The CROWD CHEERS. The team scores immediately. Mason goes wild.

MASON (CONT'D)
What did I tell you? What did I fucking tell you?

CONTINUED: (3)

While Mason rambles on, Genessa and Hudson focus on how to get out. She carefully closes her laptop and puts it under her arm. Finally, the players move to the other end of the court and they see their chance.

They slide out and make for the end of the bleachers. A door. Genessa runs to it. But before she can push it open, Hudson grabs her arm and pulls her back.

HUDSON

Wait.

GENESSA

What?

HUDSON

Listen to me. Don't look. Do you hear me? Look right at me.

GENESSA

What are you doing?

HUDSON

On the other side of the court, directly across from us, there are these... Don't look! ...two guys, old guys. They were in the café this afternoon.

GENESSA

Are you sure?

HUDSON

Yeah. Oh, yeah. They don't belong here. And they're watching us.

GENESSA

What should we do?

HUDSON

We can't go. They'll follow us and fucking kill us.

GENESSA

Okay.

They move back to the press bench and sit. Mason didn't notice they had left.

MASON

Did you guys see that pathetic free throw? That number 6 couldn't hit the side of a barn.

CONTINUED: (4)

He rambles on.

Meanwhile, out of corner of their eyes, Genessa and Hudson watch as the two guys move back to the bleachers and lean on the railing by the passage to the main entrance. Another score. The CROWD CHEERS.

Genessa has an idea.

GENESSA

(Shouting over the crowd)
Who's that kid you're talking to?

HUDSON

Uh, Mason. Works for the school paper.

She writes her number on her paper pad and tears it off.

GENESSA

Let me talk to him.

She reaches across Hudson and taps Mason on the shoulder. Mason turns to her.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Hey, Mason. Genessa. I got a big favor to ask.

She hands him the number.

INT. LUCERNE GYM - LATER

As the half-time BUZZER sounds. The crowd cheers and hundreds stand and head for the exit.

INT. LUCERNE GYM PRESS TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Genessa grabs her laptop, and she and Hudson head out. They melt into the crowd and move with the flow toward the main exit. Then, gradually make their way to the side and slip into another door that leads into the...

INT. LUCERNE HIGH LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They move quickly down an aisle past the players, looking for a way out. They hit a dead end and go a different way, then run right into an area with a group of excited players, laughing and horsing around. One partially-disrobed player covers himself.

CONTINUED:

PLAYER

Hey!

GENESSA

Sorry. I'm uh... I was looking for the coach.

(Holds up her press pass)

I'm with the press.

PLAYER

(Pointing)

He's over there.

GENESSA

Thanks.

The two run in that direction, but only until the players can no longer see them. Then, they find a door marked with an exit sign and leave.

EXT. LUCERNE HIGH - CONTINUOUS

As they make their way to the parking lot, keeping to the shadows.

INT. HUDSON'S PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

The two climb in and Hudson starts the engine.

GENESSA

Do you see them?

HUDSON

No, I think we're good.

He spins out, heading for the highway. Genessa looks back out the window.

GENESSA

Holy shit. Don't get in an accident now.

HUDSON

I know what I'm doing. Where are we going?

GENESSA

I don't know. Just drive.

HUDSON

Which direction?

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

That way.

HUDSON

Back to town?

GENESSA

I don't know. You decide.

HUDSON

Shit.

He heads back to Willits on the highway.

GENESSA

They know where I live and they obviously know where you live. And they know where we work, and what your car looks like. And they know everything else about us. So, I don't know. I don't know.

HUDSON

Let's go to the cops.

GENESSA

I already told you we can't do that.

HUDSON

Then what?

EXT. WILLITS STAR - NIGHT

The truck speeds down the empty street by the Star. Then, skids and turns into the dirt drive next to the building to the rear lot.

The truck parks next to Genessa's car. The two get out and hurry toward the building.

HUDSON

Let's go in the back way.

GENESSA

It's locked.

HUDSON

But they might see us from the street.

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

Listen to me, nobody ever goes in that way. It's always locked. They keep it locked.

HUDSON

I'm trying it anyway.

GENESSA

Hudson, don't.

Hudson reaches out and turns the door handle and it opens. Genessa stops.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Okay, whatever.

INT. WILLITS STAR BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hudson enters followed by Genessa. They look up and freeze.

DELOIT

Close the door, please.

Hudson closes the door behind them. Deloit is seated with Grace and Dick in folding chairs. They look as surprised as Genessa and Hudson.

DELOIT (CONT'D)

Well, I wasn't expecting you. The game over already?

GENESSA

Uh, not exactly.

DELOIT

Well, have a seat.

The two find a place on a box. They all stare at each other in SILENCE for a minute. Then Genessa, takes a shot...

GENESSA

I'm sorry I didn't stay for the game to finish. I've arranged for-

DELOIT

Don't worry about it.

GENESSA

Another press, a guy has, who knows the, a kid with the school actually is calling...

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

GENESSA (CONT'D)
when the game is over with... I
couldn't stay. I had to, uh... I
forgot I had to-

DELOIT
It's okay, really.

Another minute of SILENCE.

GENESSA
Should we go... or... I feel like
we're in the way...

Deloit stands.

DELOIT
(Mildly threatening)
Why don't you just stay here for a
minute.

He walks to the shipping table and refills his coffee.

DELOIT (CONT'D)
Want some coffee?

They shake their heads. He walks back to the group, and
stands behind Dick. He sips his coffee and keeps an eye on
Genessa.

Suddenly the back door flies open and there's Phil. He
freezes when he sees Genessa and Hudson. Then, he turns to
Deloit, mouth agape. Deloit shrugs and Phil enters the room
followed by the White House guy.

The White House guy sizes up the group, then sees two
familiar faces, and smiles.

WHITE HOUSE GUY
(To Genessa and Hudson)
What the fuck. I thought for sure
you guys were screwed.
(To Phil)
She's the one.

The group turns to Genessa.

DELOIT
Do you have it?

GENESSA
I'm not sure.

DELOIT
The data card. The one he gave you.

CONTINUED: (2)

She turns to Hudson.

HUDSON
He's the guy.

She pulls the SD card out of her laptop and hands it to Deloit. Then, he hands it to Grace, who plugs it into a laptop. The White House Guy looks over her shoulder.

A moment later Dick looks up and smiles.

WHITE HOUSE GUY
That's it.

GRACE
I'll start the upload.

Grace presses a button.

GRACE (CONT'D)
It's going.

The group breathes a collective sigh and they lean back in their chairs.

WHITE HOUSE GUY
Okay. I need to go right now. I can't use my rental car. I'm sure they know it by now. Who can drive me?

DELOIT
They know all of our cars.

They think for a moment. Then, they turn in unison to Genessa.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

As Genessa's Geo Metro flies down the empty road.

INT. GENESSA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Genessa is driving with the White House Guy in SILENCE. Hudson is in the back seat.

WHITE HOUSE GUY
How much longer?

GENESSA
Another hour at least.

CONTINUED:

He squirms, something is bothering him. The pressure on him is unbearable.

WHITE HOUSE GUY
That's cutting it pretty close. My plane is at 10.

GENESSA
I'm sorry.

WHITE HOUSE GUY
Mind if I smoke?

GENESSA
Uh, I guess not.

He lights a cigarette and starts dragging with intensity. More SILENCE.

GENESSA (CONT'D)
So, do you work for the White House?

WHITE HOUSE GUY
Huh?

GENESSA
When I called you-

WHITE HOUSE GUY
I don't work for the White House. What are you talking about?

He winces in pain.

GENESSA
Where did you get all that... all the stuff...

WHITE HOUSE GUY
You'll find out when it's published. Pretty soon the whole world will know.

GENESSA
(She looks at the dashboard)
Shit.

WHITE HOUSE GUY
What?

CONTINUED: (2)

GENESSA

I need gas. We'll never make to San Francisco.

He sighs and clutches his chest.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

WHITE HOUSE GUY

Yeah.

He's not.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

A small-town station as Genessa pulls up to a pump.

INT. GENESSA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Genessa and Hudson open their doors. The White House Guy is bent over in pain.

WHITE HOUSE GUY

I need some water.

He opens his door.

EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Genessa gets out and watches the White House Guy as he heads to the mini-mart. Hudson starts pumping gas. Before the White House Guy reaches the door, he collapses. Genessa runs to him.

GENESSA

Uh, are you okay? Obviously not.

She shakes him. He's out cold or dead. Who knows?

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Hudson, come here!

He runs over to them.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

He's not moving.

Hudson bends down, watches for any sign of movement. They are clueless.

CONTINUED:

HUDSON
What the fuck?

The clerk from the mini-mart runs out.

CLERK
What's going on?

HUDSON
I don't know. He just collapsed.

GENESSA
He was having pain... in the, uh,
chest area... and just-

CLERK
(Pulling out his cell
phone and dialing)
Either of you guys know CPR?

They shake their heads, and roll him over on his back. The clerk reaches the operator.

CLERK (CONT'D)
(On phone)
Hi, I'm working down here at the
Super Gas and we got a guy who had
a heart attack or something. He's
just lying here. Looks dead.

Genessa stands and starts dialing her cell phone, while the Clerk and Hudson continue working on the guy.

CLERK (CONT'D)
(To Hudson)
The ambulance is coming. See if
he's breathing.

Genessa reaches someone on her phone and steps away from them.

GENESSA
(On phone)
Hi, this is Genessa Thode. Genessa
Th- Right. We're at a gas station
in Ukiah-

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WILLITS STAR BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Deloit is on the phone with her. The others are standing around in a state of panic.

CONTINUED:

DELOIT

Let me talk to the man you're driving.

GENESSA

You can't. He's-

DELOIT

Look, it's important.

GENESSA

He's lying on the ground. Maybe dead. The ambulance is coming. He can't talk.

DELOIT

What's going on?

GENESSA

We stopped for gas and he's out cold. Maybe dead.

DELOIT

Okay, listen to me very carefully. You need to somehow tell him our upload was cut off. Our internet is completely dead. It's them. Somehow they stopped it. We need to know what to do.

GENESSA

He can't talk, as I say. He's dead or something.

DELOIT

It's all going to come crashing down!

GENESSA

I can't help it!

DELOIT

Okay, listen-

GENESSA

No. You listen!

She's shaking. The words just spill out, as she approaches another transformation.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, but I don't know things!
I deserve to know things!

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

GENESSA (CONT'D)

I'm driving a dead guy to the airport and there are killers following me in vans and everyone keeps telling me what to do but nobody's telling me what's going on. Nobody. I'm completely in the dark here.

DELOIT

All right. Calm down!

GENESSA

You calm down!

DELOIT

Are you going to let me tell you?!

GENESSA

Please!

DELOIT

Okay. Listen!

GENESSA

Go!

DELOIT

The guy you're driving is a whistle blower who used to work for the NSA. We were uploading data he acquired that contains secret plans for a data mining facility at the new federal building, which just happens to be located right over a major fiber optic cable, carrying all communications for the Pacific Rim. If they get their way, the NSA will be able to extract every bit of data that goes through the cable.

GENESSA

(Excited)

That's terrible.

DELOIT

Of course.

GENESSA

But why Willits.

CONTINUED: (3)

DELOIT

Because he was afraid he'd be caught if he tried to go to a large paper like the New York Times.

GENESSA

What's going to happen now?

DELOIT

What do you think?

GENESSA

Are they going to arrest you?

DELOIT

They can't arrest us, because we're the press. But they're doing everything they can to stop us. The only one in danger is the guy you're driving. His only hope is to catch a flight to Ecuador tonight.

Genessa looks over as the aid car arrives and technicians rush to the guy.

GENESSA

Okay then. I'll be in touch.

DELOIT

Wait. Listen. I'm sorry you had to get involved in this. Do what you can, but don't risk your life. It's not worth it. I owe you one. Okay?

GENESSA

(Transformation complete)
Yeah. It's okay. I'm... I'm a journalist and these things happen.

DELOIT

Wait.

She hangs up and marches over to the technicians as they use paddles to restart the guy's heart. After a few tries, he takes a long breath and coughs, eyes open.

GENESSA

So what's up?

TECHNICIAN

Pretty sure it's a major heart attack.

CONTINUED: (4)

GENESSA

Is he going to be okay?

TECHNICIAN

Hard to say. We need to get him to the hospital. You know him?

GENESSA

Barely. We were...

(Fabricating)

He was hitchhiking near Willits and we were giving him a ride to, uh, Bakersfield, I think.

TECHNICIAN

What's his name?

GENESSA

That's all I know.

(To Hudson)

Come on, uh, Sam. We need to get on the road to Bakersfield.

Hudson follows her lead, mouth agape as usual. The technicians start to load the guy in the aid car.

Genessa walks over to the guy on the stretcher.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Hey, don't worry. Okay?

The guy panics with the oxygen mask, tries to form words. He grabs her arm.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

You're in good hands. They'll take care of you. We have to, uh, deal with some things in Bakersfield and we'll check with you tomorrow.

WHITE HOUSE GUY

What are you doing?

GENESSA

(Leaning in to him)

Listen, you're going to have to trust me. Trust me. Calm down. Relax. Don't worry.

He stares at Genessa as the technicians load him in, close the door and take off. She goes to Hudson and starts to tell him something. Then, her phone RINGS. She answers. Hudson follows her to the car.

CONTINUED: (5)

GENESSA (CONT'D)

(Oh phone)

Hello.

MASON (V.O.)

Hi, it's Mason.

GENESSA

(On phone)

Oh hi, Mason. So, what's up?

MASON (V.O.)

I got the story for you.

GENESSA

The story?

MASON (V.O.)

Yeah, I wrote the whole thing.

GENESSA

Wow, thanks.

MASON (V.O.)

How can I get it to you?

GENESSA

Well, I'm kind of busy now. Um, can you mail it?

MASON (V.O.)

I thought you needed it tonight for a deadline.

GENESSA

Oh yeah. Yes, I do. But I can't, I'm not where I can...

MASON (V.O.)

How about I put it up on the school server and text you the link?

GENESSA

Yeah, that would work. Thanks.

MASON (V.O.)

Can I get my name in the byline?

GENESSA

Byline? Yeah, I'll ask. Shouldn't be a problem. Thanks.

She hangs up and starts to open the car door.

CONTINUED: (6)

HUDSON

What's going on?

GENESSA

The government guys shut off the Internet at the Star, and they couldn't finish the upload.

HUDSON

What are we going to do?

GENESSA

I don't know.

HUDSON

What about getting him to the airport?

GENESSA

We can't help him now.

HUDSON

What do you mean?

GENESSA

We have to upload the files. That's what we have to do. None of this matters if the files don't get uploaded.

HUDSON

Uploaded where? We don't know where.

GENESSA

Hudson-

HUDSON

It's not our job. How are we supposed to-

GENESSA

Hudson, this is very important. The government... we have to stop the government.

HUDSON

What? How?

GENESSA

How does anyone stop the government? You just... do it.

CONTINUED: (7)

HUDSON

We're going to stop the government?!

GENESSA

Someone has to. We're the only ones that can do it. Us. We. I copied the data to my laptop. The only other copy is the SD card that's sitting there with no Internet. If we don't do it... It's up to us. Don't you see?

HUDSON

How?

GENESSA

I don't know. I don't know.

Something hits her. She steps away from the car. Hudson follows. She dials the phone.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Hey, Mason. Did you say something about a server?

EXT. LUCERNE HIGH - NIGHT

Genessa's Geo metro pulls into a hidden parking spot near the main school building. Hudson and Genessa get out and Genessa folds the passenger seat back to let Mason out.

The two follow Mason as he power walks across the lawn to the main school building.

MASON

They normally don't give kids access to the school servers, but Mr. Johnson got tired of me annoying him all the time and pulled some strings. Now I can upload stuff after school or anytime I want. I just have to, you know, follow the rules and shit.

He stops and turns to the them.

MASON (CONT'D)

If they see these files up there, I'm screwed.

GENESSA

Got it.

CONTINUED:

MASON

I have to take them down Monday, at the latest, okay?

GENESSA

Yeah. By then I'll figure out what to do with them. I promise.

Mason is not so sure, but turns and makes his way through a hedge growing under the first floor windows. He climbs up on a cement block and grabs a corner of a window. Then, pulls the metal window frame open.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

MASON

This is how we get in.

GENESSA

But I thought you had a key or something.

MASON

Oh, students can't have keys.

With the window open wide he hoists himself up on the ledge, swings his legs around and hops in. Then looks out.

MASON (CONT'D)

Come on.

GENESSA

I don't know. This is...

HUDSON

Need help?

Hudson moves around Genessa and pops through the window.

GENESSA

Hudson. I think the line... we're crossing it. This is going beyond...

HUDSON

Hey, think about what you have on your laptop. And then think about breaking into a school.

GENESSA

Ok. Whatever. This is going beyond what we should be doing to...

CONTINUED: (2)

Hudson offers his hand to help her through the window. Meanwhile, Mason runs in, switches on low lights and fires up some ancient computers.

INT. SCHOOL PAPER - CONTINUOUS

As Genessa turns on her laptop and they wire it up to the network...

MASON

So what kind of story is it.

GENESSA

Story?

MASON

The stuff we're uploading. What is it?

GENESSA

Well, it's pretty big. Very big.

MASON

What could be big in Willits?

GENESSA

It goes beyond Willits actually.

MASON

You mean it involves Lucerne too?

GENESSA

Yes. And other places.

MASON

Are you going to tell me what it is?

He stops working and stares at her.

GENESSA

What if I don't?

MASON

I'm taking a big chance here not even knowing what I'm uploading. I don't know you guys. For all I know you're like criminals or hackers or something.

GENESSA

We're not criminals.

CONTINUED:

HUDSON
We're not?

GENESSA
Hudson.

MASON
Hey, what is this?

GENESSA
Okay, so we're breaking the law a bit, but we're doing the right thing.

HUDSON
Absolutely.

Mason starts to unplug her laptop.

MASON
Okay, you guys have to leave. This isn't worth it. I need the truth and all I'm getting is-

GENESSA
Okay I'll tell you. Plug it in.

He does and continues working.

MASON
Start talking.

GENESSA
These files are from a government whistle blower. They contain secret NSA documents and email. And they need to get to a whistle blower site as soon as possible so they can be published for the whole world to see. There are government agents trying to stop us. I don't think they know where we are, but they might.

MASON
Shit. I really shouldn't be doing this.

GENESSA
(With passion)
Neither should we. But somebody has to.

That did it. He's convinced.

INT. WILLITS STAR BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Grace is still pushing buttons on the laptop, as Dick, Deloit and Phil look over her shoulder.

DICK

Can you access anything?

GRACE

I can get to all the machines on the internal network, but the Internet is still dead.

PHIL

What about Wi-Fi?

GRACE

What good will it do to get on the Wi-Fi if the Internet's dead?

PHIL

I mean you know the Wi-Fi next door. There must be some Wi-Fi we can get to.

GRACE

I tried that. Remember? They all need passwords. And their Internet's probably dead too.

DELOIT

Look I got an idea. We can go to my house and get on there.

GRACE

They'll catch us.

DICK

If we try to leave, they'll just follow us. If they can cut off the Internet here, they can-

DELOIT

Shit. We're stuck.

GRACE

They're probably outside right now, just waiting.

DELOIT

Why would they be doing that?

GRACE

Who knows? It's the government.

CONTINUED:

Deloit opens the door into the front office, and receives a blast of red flashing light from three or four cruisers pulling up to the building.

He SLAMS the door. Then, runs to the door leading to the back parking lot, and opens it. Two plain-clothes officials STANTON and PARKER (40s) are standing in the doorway facing him.

STANTON
(Holds up his shield)
Hi. Franklin Deloit?

DELOIT
Yes.

STANTON
(Mr. Friendly)
My name's Stanton. This is Mr. Parker. We're with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. We have a few questions for you, if you don't mind?

DELOIT
Sure. Do I need an attorney?

STANTON
I don't think that'll be necessary.

As they continue, Deloit's phone vibrates. He takes it out of his pocket and hands it to Grace behind his back.

DELOIT
Okay. Go ahead.

Grace takes the phone and turns away from the men. She looks at the caller ID. It's Genessa. She presses "Answer" and sets it down out of sight.

STANTON
We are looking for a man by the name of Walter Pinnicker. We have good reason to believe he is in town and he contacted you this evening. Is that true?

DELOIT
I don't know anyone by that name.

STANTON
He may have used a different name.

CONTINUED: (2)

DELOIT

Hmm, no. I don't recall talking to-

STANTON

Listen, this is very serious. May we come in?

DELOIT

Do you have a search warrant?

STANTON

(Big smile)

We don't need to search anything right now, Mr. Deloit. We're just cold. Is it okay?

DELOIT

I suppose.

The two men enter and face the four old newspaper people. Deloit closes the door.

INT. SCHOOL PAPER - CONTINUOUS

Genessa has her phone on speaker. The three listen intently.

STANTON (V.O.)

Mr. Pinnicker was in possession of stolen government property, containing highly confidential data. And I must warn you that he and anyone who may currently possess the property are in violation of numerous very serious federal laws, not the least of which is treason, for which the death penalty is often recommended.

Genessa turns from the phone to the progress bar on the computer - barely 13% uploaded.

INT. WILLITS STAR BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

STANTON

Do you understand the seriousness of the situation? Have I made myself clear?

DELOIT

Yes. But, we don't-

CONTINUED:

STANTON

We know what's going on. We know he has handed it off to you.

DELOIT

What? Handed what off?

STANTON

(Losing his patience)

It's data. Lots of important data. Probably on a thumb drive or SD card, about this big.

Making a gesture with his fingers. He notices the laptop on the bench.

STANTON (CONT'D)

And I'm guessing it's in that computer over there. Can I have it please?

He inches toward the computer.

STANTON (CONT'D)

As I say, the violations are very serious. You may be under the impression that you are doing some sort of community service by releasing the data. But let me assure you-

Deloit stands in his way.

DELOIT

(Struggling to speak)

You can't have it. You need, you need a search warrant. I can't let you take it.

STANTON

(He looks Deloit in the eye)

I was hoping that I had made myself clear. This is not your property. It is stolen property. If I have to get a search warrant, I will. But it will be seen as a refusal by you to surrender the stolen property. That will not look good in court. You may be in possession of it, but it's not yours. Do you understand?

CONTINUED: (2)

DELOIT
(Panicking)
This is unlawful seizure. This is a newspaper and we have rights.

Stanton moves closer.

DELOIT (CONT'D)
Under the freedom of the press amendment, we have the right to publish anything we want. And you can't stop us.

STANTON
Mr. Deloit, I'm not trying to stop you from publishing whatever you want. I'm trying to avoid hauling all of you in for possession of stolen government property.

GRACE
Franklin, give it to him.

DELOIT
But this is-

DICK
Do it, Frank. It's okay. This is uh, it's not worth it.

DELOIT
This is wrong. What this data shows is that... This is wrong. This is just wrong. You can't hide this from the American people. We have a right to know the truth about what you're doing in our town. This information belongs to the people!

Stanton faces Deloit and holds his hand out.

DELOIT (CONT'D)
This is illegal search and seizure. You have entered a place of business and you're illegally forcing me to, to-

STANTON
Just to be clear, I'm not forcing you to do anything.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (3)

STANTON (CONT'D)

You're going to hand me the card
and I'm going to walk out of here
with my property, because you know
it's wrong to keep it and if you do
not, I will be forced to-

DELOIT

All right.

He turns to the laptop and fumbles around with it.

DELOIT (CONT'D)

Grace, how do you get this thing
out of here.

Grace removes the card. She looks at it for a second. Then,
she hands it to Deloit, and he turns to Stanton and drops it
in his hand.

Then, Stanton steps back and motions to the uniformed cops at
the door. They enter with handcuffs. The four small-town
newspaper staffers can't believe they have been had.

GRACE

What are you doing?

DELOIT

You're arresting us anyway?! This
is unbelievable.

Grace grabs the cell phone, drops it on the floor and crushes
it with her foot.

INT. SCHOOL PAPER - CONTINUOUS

As the phone goes dead. Genessa, Hudson and Mason are silent.
They turn to each other.

MASON

What happened?

GENESSA

They nailed 'em.

MASON

Nailed 'em? Hey, I don't want to be
nailed. This is fucked up.

Mason starts to unplug the laptop, but Hudson stops him.

HUDSON

Wait. We're not doing anything
wrong.

CONTINUED:

MASON

We're fucking committing treason.

HUDSON

Hey, think about it. Just think about it. We're not the bad guys. We just got some data and we're making it public. Just doing our job. We don't have any stolen property. Do you see any stolen property? It's a laptop, Genessa's laptop.

MASON

Umm, it could be argued that the stuff on the laptop is actually stolen. And it is. It really is.

GENESSA

(Standing between him and the laptop)

Okay, it's stolen. So what? By the time the public sees it, it'll be too late for the FBI to do anything. They can't accuse the American people of stealing their own secrets. Can they? They can't arrest the whole country.

MASON

I guess not.

GENESSA

The government is wrong. Right?

Mason nods.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

They're mining our data, taking our data, stealing it.

HUDSON

They're the ones that are stealing. They're the criminals.

GENESSA

But we can't arrest them. No. This is all we can do. It's how we get back. It's us or them.

HUDSON

It's on us.

CONTINUED: (2)

GENESSA

If we don't do something, no one
will ever know the truth.

HUDSON

And that's our job.

They ponder that for a moment. Mason likes the sound of it.
Then, Hudson's phone breaks the silence. He looks at the
screen.

HUDSON (CONT'D)

It's my mom.

He starts to press the screen to answer. Then, Mason grabs
his hand.

MASON

Wait. Stop.

HUDSON

What?

MASON

They can find us with these.

GENESSA

The tracking signal.

MASON

You guys need to turn off your
phones now. Right now. And take out
the sim card and the battery. They
have to be completely dead.

Genessa and Hudson open their phones and remove the cards and
batteries.

GENESSA

I can't believe I didn't think of
this before.

HUDSON

They've probably been tracking us
this whole time.

GENESSA

(To Mason)

What about yours?

MASON

They don't know who I am.

CONTINUED: (3)

GENESSA

But they can find you. Trace me to you. They have our call records. Right? That's what they do. They can look at mine and see that you called me tonight.

MASON

Shit.

Mason pulls out his phone and opens it up.

GENESSA

They bugged my phone at work. Who knows? They can probably listen to all our conversations.

HUDSON

That's how they've been following us. They probably know where we are and what we're doing. Do you think they got to my mom?

GENESSA

They obviously know where you live.

HUDSON

Maybe she was trying to call me to tell me she was in trouble.

GENESSA

That doesn't make sense. Why would they be after your mom?

MASON

You're just being paranoid.

HUDSON

(Panicking)

Yeah, I'm being paranoid! I'm paranoid all right! This shit is happening. It's fucking real.

GENESSA

Hudson, stop. Think. Why would they waste their time with your mom? Think about it. They want us. And they want the White House guy. What was his name?

MASON

They said Walter something.

CONTINUED: (4)

GENESSA

Yeah, Walter. Something like
Pinker, Pinnicker.

MASON

(Brightens)

But wait a minute, why would they
want us?

GENESSA

Because they think we're part of
it. They've been following me for
days.

MASON

But they got the card.

HUDSON

He's right. How do they know you
made a copy of it?

GENESSA

Right. Okay. So, that makes sense.

MASON

As far as they know, you never even
had the card.

GENESSA

Maybe. I'll have to think about it.
Doesn't mean we can stop being
careful. How much time is left?

Mason looks at the laptop.

MASON

About four hours.

They find some hard school chairs and sit in silence.

INT. WILLITS JAIL INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

As the door opens and Deloit enters. Stanton and Parker are
seated at the table.

STANTON

Mr. Deloit. Come on in and have a
seat.

He sits across from them.

CONTINUED:

DELOIT

What is this? I thought you were going to release us.

STANTON

We are. We just have a few things to wrap up first. We're still trying to locate Walter Pinnicker. He's the one we really want.

DELOIT

I don't know where he is. I really don't.

STANTON

After he gave you the card, where did he go?

Deloit thinks.

STANTON (CONT'D)

I think you know where he went. In fact, I'm positive you know.

(Waits)

Believe me. It's not in your best interest to try to protect him. He broke the law. You don't want to be part of that.

He waits. Then, he stands and paces, threateningly.

DELOIT

He was going to the airport to fly out of the country.

STANTON

Which airport?

DELOIT

San Francisco, I think.

STANTON

What country?

DELOIT

Ecuador. I don't know if he made it. We haven't been in contact, obviously.

PARKER

I'll check the airport.

Parker rushes out of the room.

CONTINUED: (2)

STANTON

Was somebody driving him?

Another wait.

STANTON (CONT'D)

How was he getting there? Mr. Deloit, there are two others - Genessa Thode and Hudson Tripp.

Deloit attempts to hide his surprise.

STANTON (CONT'D)

I know you know who they are. Genessa works for you. She placed a call to you at 7:32 tonight from a gas station in Ukiah, California; and again at 10:17 from a high school in Lucerne. Where was she going, and what was she doing?

DELOIT

She was covering a basketball game in Lucerne. I don't know about the other place. She had nothing to do-

STANTON

Did they drive Pinnicker to the airport?

Silence.

STANTON (CONT'D)

(Raising his voice)

When you don't answer a question, that just tells me you are hiding something. Do you think you're fooling me?

DELOIT

No.

STANTON

Then, what are you doing?

DELOIT

It's very difficult.

STANTON

But it's not. It's simple. You either answer my question, or you go back to jail.

CONTINUED: (3)

DELOIT

All right.

They wait.

STANTON

Are you going to tell me?

Deloit stares at a spot on the table.

INT. SCHOOL PAPER - MORNING

The first light of day finds Genessa and Hudson curled up asleep on the floor, covered in coats and anything soft they could locate. Her eyes pop open and she sees Mason sitting at a computer. It's quiet now, there's a settled feeling in the air.

She gets up slowly and walks over to him, looks over his shoulder.

GENESSA

Hey. What are you working on?

MASON

Thought I'd do a little work on the game story.

GENESSA

So you can just work on it whenever you want?

MASON

Yeah.

She looks at the screen.

GENESSA

Is that the school paper?

MASON

Yeah. I do the layout for the paper too. It's all online.

GENESSA

Cool.

(Yawning)

How's the upload coming?

He presses the pad on the laptop to wake up the screen.

CONTINUED:

MASON

Hey. Just finished. What happens next?

GENESSA

I don't know.

MASON

I'll be honest. I've been having second thoughts.

GENESSA

Me too.

MASON

All I'd have to do is delete the files and that would be it.

GENESSA

I know.

She walks over to the window and looks through the blinds at the fog forming over the lawn, as the sun begins to warm the morning dew.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Is that what you want to do?

MASON

Delete the files?

GENESSA

Yeah.

MASON

Part of me does.

GENESSA

Me too.

She walks back to Mason, and they look each other in the eye.

MASON

Well, unless you can think of what to do with them... I don't know.

GENESSA

Where can we get coffee around here?

INT. LUCERNE COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

As the three crowd around a flimsy wooden table. Hudson and Mason stare at their coffee with sleep-deprived eyes. Genessa is doing something with her laptop. She puts on a Bluetooth headset.

GENESSA

(On phone; her perky character)

Hello, I was wondering if you had a patient by the name of Walter Pinnicker staying with you?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. UKIAH HOSPITAL NURSES STATION - CONTINUOUS

As a nurse cradles a phone on her shoulder and turns to a list on her computer.

NURSE 1

I see a person by that name was admitted last night.

GENESSA

Oh, thank God. I'm his sister from Bakersfield. He was on his way to visit me, us, me and my husband and kids, and never showed up, so we were worried. Can I talk to him?

NURSE 1

Well, he had a pretty serious heart attack and we got him on fluids and meds to stabilize him.

GENESSA

Oh my God. Is he going to be all right?

NURSE 1

I can't really say. I'll transfer you. Hold on.

INT. UKIAH HOSPITAL WALTER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As the phone rings and a nurse picks up.

NURSE 2

Hello.

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

Walter? Can Walter Pinnicker talk?
I'm his sister from Bakersfield.

NURSE 2

I'll see.

She opens the curtains surrounding Pinnicker's bed. The critical care room holds several other patients behind curtains.

NURSE 2 (CONT'D)

Mr. Pinnicker. Can you take a call?

He looks up, alarmed. He's tethered to an IV and heart monitor.

PINNICKER

That depends.

NURSE 2

It's your sister from Bakersfield.

PINNICKER

Sister? I don't... Oh yeah. My
sister. Yeah, sure.

She hands him the phone and closes the curtain.

PINNICKER (CONT'D)

Yes?

GENESSA

Is this Walter Pinnicker, the guy I
was driving to the-

He pushes the phone close to his mouth and whispers through clenched teeth.

PINNICKER

(Heart racing again)
What the hell is going on?

GENESSA

Calm down. Everything is okay.

PINNICKER

The hell it is. The fucking hell it
is.

GENESSA

Listen. The FBI raided the
newspaper and got the card, and
arrested Mr. Deloit and the others.

CONTINUED: (2)

PINNICKER

Shit. I should have known.

GENESSA

(Trying to cheer him)

But I'm okay.

PINNICKER

Swell. Where are you? What are you doing?

GENESSA

That's what I'm trying to tell you. I was able to upload the files to a server.

PINNICKER

How did you get them?

GENESSA

I copied them from the card. They're all there. The files are safe, I'm safe, I think, for now.

PINNICKER

What are you going to do with them?

GENESSA

Well, that's why I'm calling. I don't exactly know what to do next.

PINNICKER

(Blowing up)

Hell, I don't know. I left it up to Deloit. He arranged something with a whistle blower site. He said he was taking care of everything. I should have known. He fucked up and now I'm fucked.

GENESSA

Okay. Finger pointing isn't going to help us-

PINNICKER

What was I thinking trusting a bunch of yahoos from some jerkwater shithole.

GENESSA

(Triggered)

Mr. Pinnicker, your distrust is placed in the wrong people.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (3)

GENESSA (CONT'D)

If anyone can be distrusted it's
not us yahoos.

PINNICKER

All right. Sorry.

GENESSA

Do you have any suggestions?

PINNICKER

I'm so fucked.

GENESSA

(Losing it)

Do you know what I think? I think
you're full of shit. All you did
was steal a bunch of secrets. But
you have no plan. You don't know
what you're doing. All you care
about is being a big hero and
saving your own ass, and leaving
your mess for someone else to clean
up.

PINNICKER

Hey, I'm sorry. Calm down.

GENESSA

You calm down.

PINNICKER

Can I talk-

GENESSA

I just spent the night in a
fucking... sleeping on the floor,
uploading your damn files. The
fucking FBI are after me and my
friends-

PINNICKER

Can I talk?

GENESSA

What.

PINNICKER

You got to get the files up on a
web site ASAP. Now. A public web
site that everybody can see. It's
our only chance. The Willits site
is compromised, who knows how to
get to the whistle blower site.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (4)

PINNICKER (CONT'D)

It has to go live now. I don't have any ideas. I'm not a journalist.

GENESSA

Well, I am.

PINNICKER

Good. Then, that's what you need to do. Figure it out!

It hits her.

GENESSA

Because if the readers could figure it out, they wouldn't need us.

PINNICKER

Whatever.

She dramatically clicks the hang-up button and stands. She's pumped. The others sense the shift and stand too.

GENESSA

(All action)

We need a web site ASAP.

She looks at Mason.

MASON

I... think that's a bad idea.

GENESSA

Do you have any others?

MASON

I wish I did.

EXT. LUCERNE HIGH - DAY

As the three walk back from the coffee shop.

MASON

It's a good thing it's Saturday. Nobody will bother to look at the site on the weekend, except maybe Mr. Johnson. But I can handle him.

GENESSA

That's good.

CONTINUED:

MASON

I'll create a new front page and we can just add the stories or whatever. Then, publish.

GENESSA

We just need to make sure this thing goes viral fucking fast. That's the only way it's going to work. Are you guys into it?

HUDSON

We're fucked no matter what we do.

GENESSA

That's the spirit.

MASON

Just so you know. I can't think under pressure. So, we'd better act quickly before I realize what I'm doing.

GENESSA

Good. I'll write the setup piece. Mason, you lay out the pages, work in the art and photos and write connecting pieces and headlines. Hudson, you research the data and write a technical summary with links.

HUDSON

Deadline?

GENESSA

One hour. We go live at nine. Okay?

They turn a corner heading toward the school and Genessa sees a familiar Ford SUV idling near the front entrance. She stops and quickly pushes the others behind a fence, out of view.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

They found us.

HUDSON

What do you mean?

GENESSA

That black SUV is the one that was following me.

HUDSON

Shit.

CONTINUED: (2)

MASON

(Thinking)

We can maybe go around that way and
use the building for cover.

They turn back.

INT. SCHOOL PAPER - LATER

As the three enter through the window. Without a word, they
grab a computer and start working.

GENESSA

We're going to be heroes.

HUDSON

Or we're going to be so fucked.

EXT. LUCERNE HIGH FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Two FBI men are waiting by the door, pacing and checking
their cell phone clocks. After a moment, they look up and see
a man approaching from the parking lot. It's MR. STAMPER
(50), the school principal.

MR. STAMPER

(Mr. Friendly)

Sorry to keep you waiting. Whoa,
almost nine. Where does the time
go? Had some kid emergencies. The
youngest one fell on a kitchen
knife this big. Put a huge gash in
his hand and I had to take him in
to the clinic. What a mess.
Surprised you didn't hear the
screaming. So anyway, what do you
need?

FBI MAN 1

We just need to check a few things
inside.

MR. STAMPER

Was that you who called?

FBI MAN 1

Yes.

(Showing his creds)

Sorry about the rush.

Stamper unlocks the door and they enter.

INT. LUCERNE HIGH HALL - CONTINUOUS

MR. STAMPER

Well, I got to tell you I'm a little uncomfortable doing this without a search warrant.

FBI MAN 1

We appreciate whatever you can do.

MR. STAMPER

So you think a fugitive is hiding out here, huh?

FBI MAN 1

Nothing that serious.

He pulls out a map printed out on letter paper.

FBI MAN 1 (CONT'D)

We're interested in checking out this part of the building.

MR. STAMPER

Interesting. How did you get the building plans?

FBI MAN 1

Well, it's a long story.

MR. STAMPER

One that you're not going to tell me, I suppose.

FBI man 1 smiles.

MR. STAMPER (CONT'D)

Hmm, well, that would be somewhere near the journalism classroom.

They start walking down the hall. Stamper keeps yammering.

INT. LUCERNE HIGH JOURNALISM CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

It's dark, except for the light coming from the computer screens. The three are huddled around the main computer, making final edits. They look up when they hear people approaching from the hall.

INT. LUCERNE HIGH HALL - CONTINUOUS

As Stamper and the FBI men approach.

CONTINUED:

MR. STAMPER

The doors are always locked and double-checked before we leave every night. Never had any problem with break-ins, well any major problems anyway. I mean, you know, there's always that element that likes to push the boundaries. But that's what you guys are for. Huh? Well, this is it.

They stop next to a door with a sign that reads: "Badger Times."

FBI MAN 1

Can we go in?

MR. STAMPER

(Looking through the window in the door)

Well, it's dark.

(He checks the door)

And the door's locked. Looks pretty empty to me.

FBI MAN 1

(Sarcastic)

Well, we've come all this way. It'd be a shame to leave without at least taking a look.

Stamper looks him in the eye. Then, he shrugs and unlocks the door, and the three enter.

MR. STAMPER

Suit yourself.

Stamper switches on the main lights. They stop and look around. Then, their heads turn in unison to the sound of RUSTLING in the corner. It's Mason. He appears to have been sleeping on a pile of jackets. He sits up and rubs his eyes.

MR. STAMPER (CONT'D)

Mason. What are you doing here?

Mason stands.

MASON

Oh wow. What time is it?

MR. STAMPER

What are you doing here?

CONTINUED: (2)

MASON

Sorry, Mr. Stamper. I know I'm not supposed to be in here.

MR. STAMPER

Yeah, you're not! What's going on?

MASON

I stayed late to work on my story. Mr. Johnson said-

MR. STAMPER

Mr. Johnson is well aware that students are not allowed in the building without supervision. And you know that too. This is not okay. You should know better.

As the conversation continues, the FBI men nose around the room. Genessa's laptop grabs their attention.

MASON

I know. I'm sorry.

FBI MAN 1

Mr. Stamper, may we ask him some questions?

MR. STAMPER

I'll do the questioning.

(To Mason)

Were you in here last night?

FBI MAN 1

Around 10:30?

MASON

Uh, yeah. I think so.

MR. STAMPER

Was anyone here with you?

Mason looks away.

MR. STAMPER (CONT'D)

Mason. Answer me. Were you alone?

MASON

(After a moment)

No.

MR. STAMPER

Who was here with you?

CONTINUED: (3)

MASON

You know I'm not some stupid kid. I was handling it. I was being responsible. Nothing's stolen-

MR. STAMPER

Mason, I know. You can tell me. I'm not trying to incriminate you.

MASON

Okay. There was somebody else.

The FBI men perk up.

MASON (CONT'D)

She was a reporter from the Willits Star.

MR. STAMPER

Do you know her name?

MASON

Genessa something.

FBI MAN 1

What was she doing here?

MR. STAMPER

(To FBI MAN)

I'm warning you. This is my school and these are my kids.

FBI MAN 1

Sorry.

MR. STAMPER

What was she doing here?

MASON

She had to miss the second half of the game last night, so I was helping her write her story. She said I could get my name in the byline.

Stamper looks at the FBI man and raises his eyebrows.

MR. STAMPER

Then, what?

MASON

Then, she left.

CONTINUED: (4)

FBI MAN 1

What time?

MASON

I don't remember. She was only here for a half hour maybe. I walked her to the exit out there and she left.

FBI MAN 1

Whose laptop is this?

Picking up Genessa's. Mason pauses to think.

MASON

Um, I don't know. It's not mine.

MR. STAMPER

It's not the school's. It was probably left here by a student.

The FBI man puts it down reluctantly. Stamper and Mason watch as the FBI men take their sweet time scanning the room one last time.

FBI MAN 1

All right. That'll be all. Thank you.

They head for the hall.

MR. STAMPER

Come on Mason. Get your stuff and let's go.

Mason grabs a backpack. Then, Stamper puts his arm around Mason and escorts him out.

MR. STAMPER (CONT'D)

I don't know what to do with you sometimes.

MASON

The news business is unpredictable. Sometimes you have to bend the rules.

MR. STAMPER

I don't disagree with you, necessarily, but this is school property and I have a job to do.

MASON

I understand. You're doing your job. And I'm doing mine.

CONTINUED: (5)

MR. STAMPER

You know what? You're just a little too smart for your own good. You're going to get yourself in trouble one of these days.

The conversation trails out as Stamper locks the door and the two head down the hall.

When the voices are far away, the cloakroom door opens and Genessa and Hudson rush out. Hudson turns on the computer monitor and clicks the Publish button. The screen changes and a progress bar shows the files uploading.

Meanwhile, Genessa switches on her laptop and opens the browser. After a moment, the site loads and a headline pops on: "Government whistle blower reveals secret data mining program".

INT. LUCERNE COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Genessa and Hudson are huddled over a table in a back corner. Genessa is making a Skype call, practically jumping out of her skin. Hudson is busy with his cell phone.

GENESSA

Hello, I'm Genessa Thode, a reporter from the Willits Star. I've just published a web site containing secret documents sent from a government whistle blower and I need your help.

INTER CUT WITH:

INT. SAN FRANCISCO TRIBUNE DESK - CONTINUOUS

As a tips operator takes Genessa's call.

TIPS OPERATOR

Wait. What was that?

GENESSA

(Slowly)

I've just published on a web site secret documents I obtained from a government whistle blower.

TIPS OPERATOR

I need to know more.

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

Here's the web site. Are you ready?

TIPS OPERATOR

Uh, yeah.

GENESSA

Http, Lucerne high school, one word, dot edu, forward slash, badger times, one word.

TIPS OPERATOR

Okay, let me check it.

The site comes up on his monitor.

TIPS OPERATOR (CONT'D)

I see it.

GENESSA

It's all real. There's no bullshit. We just put it up there. You can check it all you want and there are links to download the files.

The Tips Operator motions to some passing people to check the site on his computer.

TIPS OPERATOR

It'll take a minute to look it over. Hold on the line.

The Tips Operator puts his phone on speaker so the group can listen in.

GENESSA

Well, do it quickly. As soon as the school discovers this on their web site, they're going to take it down and that'll be the end of it and me and my friends who spent all night getting this together. Not to mention the FBI is after us.

TIPS OPERATOR

Did you steal this?

GENESSA

No, a guy... a government employee did... and handed it off to us to publish. It's all in there. Data mining. They want to build a data mining facility in Willits and we can't let them do it.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

GENESSA (CONT'D)

We need to stop them. And this is it. The public needs to know.

TIPS OPERATOR

Can we share the link?

GENESSA

Yes, please do. Share it with everyone, everyone you see. We need this to go public as soon as possible. Viral.

A man PAUL standing over the Tips Operator speaks up.

PAUL

Hello, my name is Paul Cleveland. I'm a reporter. Are you in danger?

GENESSA

Yes. I believe, actually, I know we are.

PAUL

How many of you are there?

GENESSA

Me and two others, three of us. Three. As I said, the FBI is doing everything they can to stop this from being published. They arrested everyone at the Willits Star last night after cutting off their Internet. As soon as they figure out where we are, they'll be all over us.

PAUL

All right. We'll start pulling the data now. Hang in there.

Paul pulls a woman standing next to him aside and speaks so the phone doesn't pick it up.

PAUL (CONT'D)

We can start crawling the site now. It's not going to hurt. If it's a hoax, we haven't lost anything. But if it's real, we need the stuff right away.

The woman nods and runs off.

CONTINUED: (3)

TIPS OPERATOR

I'll need your names and some way
to contact you.

PAUL

Where are you?

GENESSA

At a coffee shop in Lucerne,
California.

PAUL

Do you want us to send someone?

GENESSA

Um, sure. Yes. Of course. Please
don't call the police or FBI.

PAUL

No, of course not.

GENESSA

We are very vulnerable now. Do you
understand?

PAUL

Of course. You can trust me. I've
been where you are. Chip will get
your information in just a minute.
Hold tight.

Genessa settles back in her chair. Her heart is racing. She
turns as Mason enters the café and heads toward them,
anxiously typing on his cellphone. He sees something and
looks up.

MASON

(Big grin)

We're live.

She runs to him and gives him a hug. Then, Hudson joins them.

EXT. LUCERNE HIGH - DAY

An NBC-TV reporter does a stand-up in front of the school.

CONTINUED:

NBC REPORTER

And it was in this high school in Lucerne, California where three young journalists took the biggest gamble of their lives, publishing over 5,000 documents, sure to start a heated international debate over the use of data mining by government entities.

WE PULL BACK to reveal a massive media circus of press and TV trucks.

The content has been live for days and it didn't take long for media outlets all over the world to begin covering it from every angle. The small Lucerne school has become a major hub of activity and the three reporters who made it all happen have become instant celebs.

EXT. LUCERNE HIGH ANOTHER AREA - DAY

Genessa is being interviewed on TV. She has her rap down now and she's brimming with confidence.

GENESSA

We knew what had to be done and we did it. We had no choice.

TV REPORTER 1

Were you even aware that you were taking on the federal government?

GENESSA

Of course. But the people had to know. We're journalists. That's what journalists do.

TV REPORTER 1

Some people might say what you did was treasonous.

GENESSA

I'm proud to be an American, because in this country no one can bring us down, no one can enslave us, not even the government.

EXT. LUCERNE HIGH ANOTHER AREA - DAY

Mason is amazing some friends.

CONTINUED:

MASON

There's this fucking huge fiber optics cable that just happens to run right through the middle of Willits, and the NSA invented this fucking laser reader thing that can suck the data right out of it. And they were going to literally record all the data, all the email, all the fucking images and documents...

INT. TV STUDIO - DAY

As a reporter stands in front of conceptual images and maps.

TV REPORTER 2

The cable carries virtually every communication on the west coast as well as much of the Pacific Rim. And the documents and diagrams found in this trove of secret information make it clear that the feds intended to record all of it. Not just metadata, but every bit of content - from public web pages to private phone conversations.

INT. TV STUDIO 2 - DAY

Another reporter

TV REPORTER 3

The government chose Willits and 23 other small towns because of their proximity to the fiber cables and because people in rural America would be less likely to question what was going on, more willing to look the other way when millions of dollars came rolling in to fill city coffers.

INT. LUCERNE HIGH PRINCIPLE'S OFFICE - DAY

As Mr. Stamper is interviewed in his office.

MR. STAMPER

We certainly could've shut down the site and thrown the book at the kids when we found out.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

MR. STAMPER (CONT'D)

But we decided to hold off for awhile, given the nature of the situation. It wasn't your run of the mill flush-a-cherry-bomb-down-the-john act of vandalism after all. Of course, we can't condone what they did, but I think the board will go lightly on them. The site got over a million hits before the servers went down. Personally, I wouldn't mind seeing the government get nailed for this.

EXT. FEDERAL COURT SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Pinnicker is standing behind his lawyer BENSON on the front steps, as Benson briefs the press.

BENSON

We are encouraged. My client has done nothing wrong. He witnessed the federal government illegally violating the rights of American citizens and he took appropriate measures.

REPORTER 1

They're calling him a traitor.

BENSON

The problem for the feds is they don't have anything else to work with except name calling. My client's actions are justified and he has done this country a great service.

INT. WASHINGTON FEDERAL BUILDING - DAY

As an executive branch official is grilled by the press.

OFFICIAL

Unfortunately, it's impossible to quantify the harm this breach in our national security has caused.

REPORTER 2

Will the program continue?

CONTINUED:

OFFICIAL

It's hard to say at this point. Without being able to monitor illegal and dangerous communications on the Internet, we are leaving ourselves open to terrorist and cyber attacks.

REPORTER 3

How do you address those who call this an invasion of privacy?

OFFICIAL

Our job is to protect American citizens. And we're doing that the best way we know how.

INT. HUDSON'S HOUSE - DAY

As he sits on the couch with his mother and siblings, being interviewed.

HUDSON

I was really scared that they'd come after my mom. I mean, we'd seen what they were capable of.

INTERVIEWER

How much input did you have with the book?

HUDSON

I'd say a lot. She wrote it but we spent hours together like going over what to say.

INTERVIEWER

Would you do it again if you had to?

HUDSON

What? The book?

INTERVIEWER

No, all that other stuff.

They laugh.

HUDSON

Oh yeah. Who wouldn't?

INT. BOOK STORE - NIGHT

As Genessa stands at a podium taking questions at her book signing. Copies of the book "The Back Door" are piled high next to giant posters.

GENESSA

I couldn't have done it without my collaborator and best friend Hudson Tripp. He was amazing and very patient.

She points out Hudson, and he stands and accepts polite applause from the small crowd.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

We worked very hard to keep the book positive, so it wouldn't become just another screaming tabloid piece. We wanted it to be more of a discussion about where we should be going, as a nation. I mean, there was a good reason why people at the NSA thought were doing the right thing.

She points to a person with her hand up.

PERSON IN AUDIENCE 1

Are you saying the NSA was justified in what they did?

GENESSA

I'm just saying we need to look at all sides, as we explore the future of data mining.

More hands go up and a handler breaks in.

PUBLICIST ASST.

Well, it's clear the discussion has begun. Thank you all for your questions.

EXT. NEW FEDERAL BUILDING - DAY

It's almost three years later and the new federal building in Willits is about to open. A number of officials, contractors and related VIPs are attending the ribbon cutting ceremony, including June Betch the mayor and Genessa.

CONTINUED:

A small contingent from the press are also present, as well as a number of locals with nothing better to do and some protesters carrying signs reading "Don't mine me", "What's mined is mine" and "Free Pinnicker".

BETCH

(over PA)

The citizens of Willits are proud to be a part of this celebration to commemorate the opening of the new Constance McCracken Federal Building. We are all pleased that the data monitoring program has been shelved and the building will only be used to serve the needs of the good people of the redwood corridor.

The small crowd applauds passionately.

BETCH (CONT'D)

And so without further ado, I June Betch, Mayor of Willits, California, hereby declare the new federal building officially open for business.

She cuts the ribbon, and then poses with some officials for grip and grin photos. The crowd applauds politely and then disperses.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING HALL - DAY

A group of ten or so VIPs are smiling and chatting, carrying lattes from a coffee bar in the building. Genessa is standing by herself, not drinking the free latte, and not amused. Betch approaches her.

BETCH

So, Genessa Thode. I don't think I've officially congratulated you on the success of your book.

She shakes her hand.

GENESSA

Thank you.

BETCH

Good stuff.

(Raising her cup)

I see you're not drinking the Kool-Aid.

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

I can't do coffee after noon.

BETCH

Neither can I, but I couldn't pass up a free cappuccino. You won't tell, will you?

Genessa smiles.

BETCH (CONT'D)

Oh, you're bad.

GENESSA

Have to keep you politicians honest.

Betch takes a sip and makes a face.

BETCH

Weak. Very weak.

She sets it on a table.

BETCH (CONT'D)

So. Got some time?

GENESSA

Sure.

BETCH

Let's go get a real drink.

INT. POP'S TAVERN - DAY

Genessa and Betch are seated in a booth with a pitcher of beer, as they raise their glasses.

BETCH

Here's to an interesting and productive life as a world-class journalist. May there always be plenty of unpleasant things to write about.

GENESSA

Here, here.

Glasses CLINK.

CONTINUED:

BETCH

So, I got to say I was a little disappointed that you didn't come to me when you were writing your book.

GENESSA

I'm sorry.

BETCH

Not a big deal. Didn't really have anything that useful to say. But...

GENESSA

I'll make sure to give you a call next time I...

Genessa stops. Betch is looking down at her drink, deep in thought, trying to find the words.

BETCH

Remember the first time we met in my office?

GENESSA

How could I forget?

BETCH

You mentioned that phone call you had with Pinnicker.

GENESSA

Oh yeah.

BETCH

I'll never forget that look on your face.

GENESSA

(Smiling)

I was scared shitless.

BETCH

I get that, but there was something else. A feeling. Gave me the chills... because I got that same feeling when I was dealing with them.

Genessa feels a chill.

GENESSA

Well, had you known then what you know now...

CONTINUED: (2)

BETCH

It's more than that. It's the feeling of... I felt completely vulnerable against this gang of lying and powerful men, who can literally do whatever they want. I mean, we really don't know why they needed to do all this. Think about it. Why would they go to all the trouble? Why do they need to record every conversation, every bit of data?

GENESSA

They claimed national security.

BETCH

But it's over the top. It's crazy. How much of that data has anything to with national security?

GENESSA

Not much, I suppose.

BETCH

Hardly any of it. Why do they need to know what you're ordering from Amazon? Or how much I have in my checking account? Why are they so driven to waste all that energy and money mining all that data? Does that make sense to you?

GENESSA

So, you're thinking they had some other reason?

BETCH

I don't know. It's just a feeling. There was this man - a tall guy - sat in the back the whole time, never said anything. They never introduced him. He was just there. Listening. I took a picture with him in it. That's him.

She shows Genessa a group meeting photo on her phone. He's in his 50s, nondescript, serious.

GENESSA

You suspect him of something?

CONTINUED: (3)

BETCH

I only suspect him, because they went to so much trouble to make sure I wouldn't.

GENESSA

Do you know anything about him?

BETCH

Found one email that mentions his name - Mel T. That's it.

GENESSA

Mel T. What are you thinking?

BETCH

I think it would be interesting to find out who this guy is?

INT. GENESSA'S DUPLEX - NIGHT

Hudson and Genessa are slouching on the sofa with their laptops.

GENESSA

I got a hit.

Hudson looks over her shoulder.

HUDSON

That was fast.

GENESSA

(Reading)

It's an email from someone named Kevin - a software developer in Los Gatos, works for a company called Exasoft.

Hudson searches on his laptop.

HUDSON

Where did you get the email?

GENESSA

He's one of those whistle blower wannabes that sent me email after the book came out.

Hudson checks the company's web site on his laptop.

CONTINUED:

HUDSON

The web site says "Exasoft makes specialized hardware for companies working at XB speeds" - whatever that means.

GENESSA

Do you think it's used for data mining?

HUDSON

What does he say?

GENESSA

Just says Mel T is one of their customer contacts. What do you think? Should I contact him?

HUDSON

I don't know. Is it worth it?

GENESSA

Well, we won't know unless we try.

INT. LOS GATOS BAR - NIGHT

A dark, upscale watering hole frequented by Silicon Valley types - a world away from Willits. Hudson and Genessa are seated with a small portly man, KEVIN (32), in a secluded booth. He isn't the slightest bit comfortable talking to the press.

KEVIN

Do you even know what XB routers are?

They shake their heads.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Okay, they're used to route extremely high-bit rate streams, like a million high-def movies. That kind of thing.

They still don't comprehend.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

They're in big data centers. You know? Connect servers to the backbone?

GENESSA

So, Mel T makes routers?

CONTINUED:

KEVIN

No, no, no, no, no. He's a customer contact, Melvin Taykar. A few years ago, we got a government contract and had to sign like top secret confidential NDAs and shit. I didn't really think much about it until I read your book.

GENESSA

They were going to use your routers for data mining?

KEVIN

Not was, is. We're still working on the contract. Nothing changed.

GENESSA

Who is Taykar?

KEVIN

He's a money guy. Some kind of investment banker in San Francisco.

GENESSA

Why would a banker be working on a secret program with the federal government?

KEVIN

That's the question. I do know XB routers are used for high-frequency trading.

HUDSON

What's that?

KEVIN

It's where computers are used to automate the buying and selling of securities at high speeds. It's crashed the stock market a few times.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Genessa and Hudson are sitting at a desk, skyping with Mason on Genessa's computer. Mason is reading something off his computer.

MASON

...And one of those crashes was caused by Taykar's bank.

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

Oh yeah?

MASON

TransConsolidated - TC. He's head of their Investment Technology division.

Genessa types in a search engine.

GENESSA

Here's an article from two years ago about a whistle blower. He found "evidence of rampant use of insider trading at TransConsolidated."

Hudson watches, as she opens the article.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

"Arno Bunker claims the company routinely made trading decisions based on information that was not known to the public. But he couldn't prove anything and was subsequently fired."

HUDSON

Let's call him.

MASON

Yeah.

GENESSA

Where am I supposed to get his number?

Hudson searches on his computer.

HUDSON

I'll see if he's on Skype?

MASON

He'd have to be crazy to use his real name on Skype.

HUDSON

Well, here's one in Hartford, Connecticut.

GENESSA

How many Arno Bunkers can there be?

CONTINUED: (2)

MASON

Try it.

Hudson shrugs and calls.

ARNO

(On Skype)

Hello.

Surprise. Genessa leans into Hudson's computer.

GENESSA

Hello, is this Arno Bunker?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ARNO'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Arno is sitting at his kitchen table in his tiny flat.

ARNO

Who wants to know?

GENESSA

My name is Genessa Thode with the
Willits Star newspaper in-

ARNO

(Highly annoyed)

Ah shit. I thought you people were
done with me, already. It was two
years ago for Christ sake.

GENESSA

I'm sorry, I was unaware of-

ARNO

Look, just leave me alone. Get out
of my life. Talk to Carl, if you
have to.

GENESSA

I'm sorry, Carl?

ARNO

Carl Salmon.

GENESSA

Salmon, as in the fish?

CONTINUED:

ARNO

Yeah. I can't talk to you people.
You know that. They got a gag order
on me.

GENESSA

Where do I find Mr. Salmon?

ARNO

Cupertino. Don't tell him I sent
you.

Arno hangs up.

EXT. CUPERTINO COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Genessa and Hudson are sitting at a sidewalk table with Carl.

CARL

Asshole keeps sending journalists
to me. Who knows why. It's annoying
as hell.

GENESSA

How do you know him?

CARL

I don't. I was an expert witness at
his trial. That's it.

GENESSA

What does Southbay Media do?

CARL

We're a clipping service.

GENESSA

And you did work for Mel Taykar?

CARL

We scanned the media for their
traders.

GENESSA

To help them decide what to buy and
sell?

CARL

Something like that.

GENESSA

Did you leave Southbay?

CONTINUED:

CARL

Hell no. Taykar's department automated the whole system. They got rid of all the researchers. It's all done with AI now.

GENESSA

That's incredible.

CARL

Won't be long before they get rid of all the traders too, and the whole company is automated.

GENESSA

The whole company run by computers?

CARL

Pretty much. They have software that crawls the Internet and feeds the data right into their trading software. You've heard of high-frequency trading?

GENESSA

Yeah.

CARL

Well, soon it'll be high-frequency everything. The whole process. A human can find maybe five clippings an hour. This AI system can pull out probably a million, and then feed that into another system that can analyze millions of potential transactions. It's infinitely more efficient than people.

HUDSON

(He turns to Genessa)

Imagine if it had access to all the data on the Internet - all the email, private phone conversations, personal documents...

GENESSA

Get through firewalls on corporate networks...

CARL

Yup. Then, you'd really have something.

INT. TRANSCONSOLIDATED BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

Genessa and Hudson walk past the guard and head to the directory. They look for Taykar.

HUDSON
Taykar's not here.

GENESSA
Here he is. Investment Technology,
35th floor.

They grab an elevator.

INT. TRANSCONSOLIDATED BUILDING 35TH FLOOR - DAY

The two stand, facing a receptionist.

RECEPTIONIST
You would have to make an
appointment to see Mr. Taykar.

GENESSA
Okay.

RECEPTIONIST
Well, that might be tough now. His
assistant is out.

GENESSA
When will they return?

RECEPTIONIST
Not for awhile. Why don't I take
your name and someone can call you?

GENESSA
(Fabricating)
Well, I'm on deadline now,
actually. I'm writing a piece for
the... San Francisco Chronicle
about the bank's transition to HFT
and data mining using artificial
intelligence, and we'd like a
comment from Mr. Taykar before we
go to press this afternoon.

RECEPTIONIST
(Suddenly interested)
Have a seat. I'll try to find
someone who can help.

INT. FLOSTER'S OFFICE TRANSCONSOLIDATED - DAY

Genessa and Hudson are seated at a glass table with Jen Floster.

FLOSTER

We are in the process of incorporating HFT in our trading, but we have certainly not automated our research department.

GENESSA

Several sources have stated that TC is using software to automate the collection of data from the Internet.

FLOSTER

Well of course we use software. But that's a far cry from automating our whole department.

GENESSA

Is TC working with the Federal government to help it mine data for research?

Floster freezes.

FLOSTER

What do you mean?

GENESSA

The government has access to phone calls, email, just about everything. Are they making that available to TC?

FLOSTER

Who did you say you were?

INT. GENESSA'S CAR - NIGHT

As they drive back to Willits on 101.

HUDSON

That look on her face...

GENESSA

She turned gray.

CONTINUED:

HUDSON

Like she just saw a train coming right at her.

GENESSA

I almost felt sorry for her. Nah, not really.

HUDSON

The Feds want us to believe it's for national security. What a bunch of shit.

GENESSA

All that money being spent, all our tax dollars, going to record all that data. It makes zero sense.

HUDSON

But it makes perfect sense for TC to spend the money.

GENESSA

TC and any other company with billions to spare. For every dollar they spend, they'll make a fortune.

HUDSON

We need to find the link.

GENESSA

Right. How can we prove that the Federal government is selling all this data to the highest bidder?

HUDSON

Maybe they're working together. Maybe TC is actually financing the program.

GENESSA

Whoa, TC financing the program. This is big.

HUDSON

Yeah, with Congress cutting the budget, TC probably has more money to work with than the Federal government.

GENESSA

And the more they spend, the more they make.

CONTINUED: (2)

HUDSON

All the banks, corporations,
countries in the world, pooling
their money...

GENESSA

Paying the US government to hand
over all our data-

All of a sudden a loud low THUMP SOUND and Genessa's car goes
dead, engine stops, lights go off. She coasts over to the
shoulder and stops.

She tries to start the engine, but there's no power.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

What's going on?

HUDSON

Must be the alternator.

GENESSA

I didn't see any warning lights. It
just stopped dead.

A truck pulls up on the shoulder behind them with its
headlights glaring through their rear window.

GENESSA (CONT'D)

Is that a cop?

HUDSON

Looks like a truck.

The driver gets out and approaches Genessa's side.

GENESSA

Now what?

She rolls down her window. The truck driver leans in real
friendly-like.

TRUCK DRIVER

Howdy. I was driving behind you.
Noticed your lights went out. Need
any help?

GENESSA

Well, yeah. We were just trying to
figure out what went wrong.

CONTINUED: (3)

TRUCK DRIVER

Hey, I'm driving a tow truck. Why don't I just tow you to the next town? You can get it worked on there. Be easier than trying to fix it out here in the dark.

GENESSA

I can't really afford it.

TRUCK DRIVER

Hey, I'm going that way anyway. I'll do it for no charge.

She turns to Hudson. He shrugs.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

The truck pulls into the same Ukiah gas station Genessa stopped at three years earlier. The three get out of the truck.

TRUCK DRIVER

Why don't you guys go inside and get yourself some coffee? I'll take care of this.

GENESSA

Thanks. I really appreciate your help. Want me to get you anything?

TRUCK DRIVER

No thanks. I'll just be taking off.

Genessa watches him for a moment. Things like this don't just happen spontaneously. Then, she and Hudson walk into the mini-market.

INT. GAS STATION STORE - CONTINUOUS

The store has a few tables and sells some hot food.

HUDSON

Go sit down. I'll take care of it.
(To the counter help)
Two coffees, please.

She goes to a table and sits. A MAN who was looking at the magazines with his back to them turns to Hudson with a big friendly smile.

CONTINUED:

MAN

Hey, Hudson. Go ahead and take a seat. I'll get your coffee.
(Including Genessa)
You folks want anything else? I hear they make a mean chili.

Hudson and Genessa go blank.

HUDSON

That's okay. I got it.

MAN

(Meaning it)
No, I insist.

Hudson hesitates, then goes to the table. The person behind the counter pours their coffee, and the Man brings it to their table.

MAN (CONT'D)

I hope I didn't alarm you.
Actually, that's not quite true. I did intend to alarm you. Do you take anything in your coffee?

They don't respond. He dumps a handful of sugar and creamers on the table and sits between them with a big smile.

MAN (CONT'D)

So, I know who you are and what you've been up to, and I've been sent with a very clear and simple message. If you continue down your current path, you will find a dead end. You will find there is no collusion between the government and private sector over access to mined data. No one is automating investment banks with AI. And there is no such thing as a laser gun that can inject data into a fiber optic cable. I'm telling you all this now so you never have to see what it's like to reach that dead end. We're not out to evangelize the glories of capitalism or change how you think. In fact, we applaud the work you did for your book. You brought the NSA to its knees and the world is a much more open and free place, bla bla bla.
(Leaning in real cozy like)

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

MAN (CONT'D)

But when you come after the money centers of the world, you attack the source of life on earth. It's serious. Very serious. You can't do that. And you must stop.

The two are too stunned to talk. His cell phone rings and he answers. Then, he turns the screen around to show them.

The Facetime screen shows Mason unconscious or dead, being held up by a man offscreen. The man lands one more heavy blow to his jaw, and Mason spins around and ends up in a bloody heap face down in mud. Genessa and Hudson are frozen.

MAN (CONT'D)

(Into the phone)

Thanks.

He hangs up.

MAN (CONT'D)

Do you have any idea how easy it is for us to do things like this? We're talking about organizations that possess trillions of dollars. Trillions. They can literally do whatever they want and they do. Nothing can stop them. They're not bullies. They don't enjoy beating up kids. It's actually a huge waste of their time. But anything that gets in their way is the enemy. If you go up against the federal government, they may send you to prison, where you can write a book about how brave and clever you are. But if you go up against big money, you die. That's how they stay in business, and that's what keeps the world turning. If you try to stop them or block them, you threaten the source of life, not some government, not some faction, not some angry mob, the very thread that holds everything together - the streams of money that flow here and there and make everything so.

He stares them in the eye. After a long uncomfortable silence...

GENESSA

(Barely able to talk)

What is, what do you... what...

CONTINUED: (3)

MAN

You're confused. There's a lot to think about.

GENESSA

What should we... Should we...

MAN

What should you do?

She nods.

MAN (CONT'D)

Stop. Now. This whole thing never existed. In fact, the people I work for want to make it as easy as possible for you to make the right decision.

He presses a button on his cell phone and a familiar image comes on the screen.

HUDSON

My house.

MAN

I'm prepared to give you all the money you'll ever need to live a very rich life. Right now. However, if you are not yet convinced that I'm serious, we know where you live, and your mother and siblings. Keep in mind that the organizations that pay my salary have bought genocides in Africa, pestilence in India, brought the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. Do you think that "the people" really started the Palestinian conflict? Hell no. They're getting the shit blown out of them. And you know what? My employers can even make your car stop dead on a dark highway.

He sets the phone on the table so they can keep looking, while he stands and grabs a bag of chips off a rack and paces.

GENESSA

Okay. We've decided. Don't hurt them.

The man walks back with a grin. He picks up the phone.

CONTINUED: (4)

MAN

(In the phone)

Thanks.

(To Genessa)

You made the right decision. But we understand that people do change their minds. And in case you change yours, remember, we know where you live. In fact, we know just about everything... about you and everything else.

The man goes back to the magazine rack where he started. After a moment, Genessa and Hudson get up and walk out slowly.

INT. GENESSA'S CAR - NIGHT

The two sit silently in the car. She turns the key in the ignition and it starts. She revs it up and slams it into gear.

EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

As her car spins in the dirt and flies off down the highway.

INT. LUCERNE HOSPITAL MASON'S ROOM - DAY

The door opens slowly, and Genessa and Hudson enter. Mason lies immobile in bed, covered in casts and gauze and wired to several machines. They approach him.

HUDSON

Hi, Mason. How you doing?

MASON

Bad.

GENESSA

How did it happen?

MASON

These two assholes came out of a bar and just started beating the shit out of me, and then they disappeared. I don't know why.

Genessa and Hudson turn to each other. Then, Genessa takes a deep breath.

CONTINUED:

GENESSA

We know... We know how you must be feeling.

MASON

I don't think so.

He coughs and tenses in pain.

HUDSON

The doctor said you're doing well and you'll be all right in a month or two. It could've been worse.

MASON

No, it couldn't have.

GENESSA

So, we have some good news about the story we're working on. We met with Mel Taykar at TransConsolidated and everything is fine. He gave us some good information and... You don't want to hear this, do you?

MASON

It's okay. I'm glad the story's coming along.

HUDSON

Well, we actually decided it was kind of a dead end. So, we're going to take a little break and focus on another topic.

MASON

Why?

HUDSON

We just, uh...

GENESSA

We thought about what happened to you and decided to wait until you were better. So you could work on it with us.

HUDSON

Who knows? Maybe we'll look at it from a different angle. Or do something else entirely. You know, the plight of whales, or global warming.

CONTINUED: (2)

MASON
Don't do that.

GENESSA
Why not?

MASON
We're so close. We can't just give up.

GENESSA
Okay.

MASON
(Straining)
Please don't give up. Tell me you won't stop. This is fucking big. We need to do it. You know that.

GENESSA
We know.

HUDSON
But if it starts taking too much of our time, maybe...

MASON
It doesn't matter. We're so close. Don't do it. Please.

HUDSON
Cool.

GENESSA
We'll come back. We'll let you know how it goes.

MASON
It's the only thing that makes me happy now.

GENESSA
I know. It makes us happy too.

She grasps his one good hand, and Hudson places his hand on top. Genessa's cell phone RINGS with a text. She holds it up with her other hand.

The sender field is blank, the message reads: "Our thoughts are with you."

THE END