

All the Principal's Men

written by

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BLACK

Cue: Claus by Los Tres

CUT TO:

- Typewritten credits over:
- Various documents being typed, printed, and scanned
- Stamp with the word "CONFIDENTIAL" on a pile of documents.
- Envelopes sealed with money, passed from hand to hand

All the while, we hear snippets of ominous phone calls:

MAN 1 (OVER PHONE)
You got it?

MAN 2 (OVER PHONE)
Yeah, but they're looking into the transfer.

MAN 1
Sweep it under the rug. Make it disappear, we don't want any loose ends. No red flags, not one.

MAN 2
This... Feels wrong, Brent.

MAN 1
You're not paid to feel. You're paid to clean up. The last thing we want is a paper trail. Just follow the damn order.

MAN 2
I'll take care of it.

- Filing cabinets creaking open folders labeled with years and names. They're burned.
- Shredder chewing up documents
- Numerous students flood the halls, clueless
- Computer showing spreadsheets and files being deleted
- Security camera hovers over an out-of-focus figure
- Phone is dialed

MAN 3 (OVER PHONE)
This line isn't safe.

WOMAN (OVER PHONE)
Then don't say anything stupid.

MAN 3
I just don't want to be caught in
the middle of something.

WOMAN
You're not in the middle. You're on
the right side. And that's what
matters.

MAN 3
Meaning?

WOMAN
It means your next paycheck arrives
on time. I want the desk empty by
tomorrow morning.

MAN 3
Consider it done.

- An office is packed and cleaned out
- New nametag lands on the desk, "Brenda Erhardt - Principal"
- Newspapers and headlines introduce new Pentucket Principal

The phone in Erhardt's office is raised to begin the morning
announcements. **CLOSE-UP ON CLASSROOM INTERCOM SPEAKER**

We see the back of Erhardt's head, men out of focus fill her
office in the background

ERHARDT (OVER INTERCOM)
Good morning, Pentucket. I'm Brenda
Erhardt, your new principal. I'm
looking forward to getting to know
all of you and guiding this school
into its next chapter.

CUT TO:

EXT. PENTUCKET HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT: Pentucket at night.

TYPEWRITER TEXT: Pentucket High School, April 2025 - Year 2
of Principal Erhardt's Tenure

The night is still. Aside from the crickets, you could hear a needle drop. A van pulls into the school and shrinks as it drives toward the building.

The van stops in front of the central office, and the sliding door releases five identical men in ski masks, dressed in black from head to toe. They sneakily approach the side door with crowbars and duffel bags.

One of the men raises a pair of keys, another stops them, raising his crowbar. The door is penetrated by the crowbar and pried open.

They enter and begin skimming the walls of files. Sorting through the necessary information and bagging it.

A crook peers out the window. Cars, far from them on the main road, whiz by occasionally. Nothing to worry about.

Eventually, a beam of light cuts through the window, and all the burglars duck. They lay low to the ground. Keys jingle in the door, and Al Mottram enters.

MOTTRAM

Hello?

His flashlight cuts through the dust clouds, he eventually hears a rattle, influencing him to investigate the noise.

He rounds a corner to reveal the five burglars crouched, frozen with their hands above their heads.

MOTTRAM (CONT'D)

Jesus.

CUT TO:

INT. CASEY'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

We watch Mr. Ruland head down the hall into Mr. Casey's office, carrying a notepad and some papers.

CASEY (INTO PHONE)

Walkie-talkies, two crowbars, five guys. Good, that's good. Alright, stay there.
(hangs up)

RULAND

I already got something for you. You see this? Two middle schoolers tried to pay for lunch with fake money. Wasn't even double-sided.

CASEY
 (approving)
 Good morning... Nightingale is down
 at the main office. One of the
 burglars had \$814, one with \$450,
 another with \$216. Mostly in
 hundred dollar bills... In
sequence.

Aidan Blot looms at the door while Ruland soaks it in.

Casey picks up the phone and dials a number. Nightingale
 Nightingale picks up from downstairs.

CASEY (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
 Nightingale.

NIGHTINGALE (INTO PHONE)
 Mr. Casey?

CASEY
 There's been a break-in at one of
 the Pentucket offices- the
 Pentucket Central Office.

NIGHTINGALE
 I'm on it.

Casey hangs up and returns to Ruland.

RULAND
 Anything else?

CASEY
 A break in,
 (points to Ruland's work)
 Middle school counterfeit scandal?
 That's not bad for a Tuesday.

RULAND
 (exiting)
 Alright, let me know what happens.

Aidan enters.

BLOTTY
 Mr. Casey, I know someone over at
 the central offices, do you want me
 to-

CASEY
 Blotty- how about you try finishing
 one story before starting another?

BLOTTY
I finished it.

CASEY
The detention slip fiasco?

BLOTTY
(lighter)
I finished it.

CASEY
Give it to me.

BLOTTY
(folding)
... I'm just- polishing it.

CASEY
Polishing? I hope you're not using
sandpaper.

BLOTTY
Yeah, yeah.

Blotty leaves, passing the window behind Mr. Casey.

INT. SCHOOL MAIN HALL - AFTERNOON

Nightingale peers into the office. The five burglars sit in
the row of chairs beside Mr. Mottram.

James jots a note down before turning to the crowded hallway
behind him, plucking out Colby Eckholt.

NIGHTINGALE
Do you know anything about what's
going on in there?

COLBY
Mr. Mottrom caught them breaking
into the central office last night.
Full-on ski masks and crowbars, the
whole thing.

NIGHTINGALE
What're the names?
(taking notes)

COLBY
Uhhh, pretty sure from left to
right it's Deven Barnes, Luke
Zavaski, Brady Jennings, Kaleb
Sands, and Owen Corkery.

NIGHTINGALE
Can't make that up.

COLBY
Tell me about it... I gotta catch
my bus, see ya!

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

James enters. Looking between the burglars and Mottram.

James approaches Mrs. Brackbill.

NIGHTINGALE
Hey, I was supposed to meet with
Mrs. Burke... Is she back there?

BRACKBILL
I'm not sure, I'll take a look.

They exchange smiles before James steps back to Mottram,
they're shoulder to shoulder. Mottram avoids eye contact.

NIGHTINGALE
I'm James Nightingale from the
Pentucket Profile.

MOTTRAM
I know who you are.

NIGHTINGALE
... Are you here in connection with
the Central Office Burglary?

MOTTRAM
I'm not here.

NIGHTINGALE
... Okay...

MOTTRAM
Well, clearly I am here. But only
as an individual. Not as a staff
member on the record.

NIGHTINGALE
And off the record.

MOTTRAM
You'll have to talk to Mr. Conway
about that.

NIGHTINGALE

Did Mr. Conway-

MOTTRAM

Neither Mr. Conway or anyone else in the administration had any knowledge of, or participation in, this incident.

James shakes off the staleness and peers at the row of burglars. They all sit in utter silence, ignoring him.

He thinks, comes to a realization.

NIGHTINGALE

(puzzled)

... Holy shi-

CUT TO:

INT. CASEY'S OFFICE - LATER

Casey, and Nightingale exchange words. Mr. Harty and Mr. Siegfried pitch in. Blotty leans against the wall, only absorbing, never giving input.

NIGHTINGALE

(reading notes)

Deven Barnes, Luke Zavaski, Brady Jennings, Kaleb Sands, and Owen Corkery.

CASEY

Any proof of what exactly they were doing?

HARTY

They were tampering with the files for a reason. Had to have been a good one.

SIEGFRIED

It's obvious they were tampering. They wouldn't go through all that to steal homework passes or make paper airplanes.

BLOTTY

All five of them are involved in some type of club, council, or student government.

NIGHTINGALE

No- One of them is student council, the other is student government. Sands is on the robotics team. And the other two are hardly anything but team captains.

BLOTTY

I just think it's obvious that with all that money and equipment, they weren't doing it for shits and gigs. They were hired.

CASEY

I'm not interested in what you think is obvious. I'm interested in what we know and don't know... Right now, we don't know why these kids broke into the school's central office.

HARTY

Could be a story or could just be class clowns.

BLOTTY

Oh, it's a story.

NIGHTINGALE

Why haven't these guys been suspended- or expelled?

SIEGFRIED

...Is there a superlative for most likely to end up in prison?

Casey shrugs off the dry humor.

NIGHTINGALE

Mottrom said to me that Conway and the administration had no knowledge of the break-in.

SEYMOUR

Isn't that what you expect them to say?

NIGHTINGALE

Yes, but I never asked if he was involved. They volunteered he was innocent when nobody asked if he was guilty.

SEYMOUR
(taking it in)
... Be careful how you write it.

CUT TO:

INT. PENTUCKET PROFILE ROOM - NEXT DAY

James sits at his desk, decorated with sticky notes and papers, his computer in the center. The phone is to his ear.

VOICE 1 (PHONE)
Two of the burglar's phone records
show phone calls with B. Conway on
the night of the break-in.

James writes it down and turns behind him.

NIGHTINGALE
(to a classmate)
Do you know the number for the
administration office?

As Vivian says it, he dials.

SALKOVITZ
Hi, administration office.

NIGHTINGALE
Brent Conway, please.

SALKOVITZ
Mr. Conway isn't here just now. He
might be in Mr. Bub's office, I'll
transfer you.

Transfers, straight to voicemail.

James sets down the phone and Googles the name. A stock photo of him pops up with name, he turns back around.

NIGHTINGALE
Do you know who Brent Conway is?

VIVIAN (CLASSMATE)
He's an administrator. Nice guy
but, I wouldn't want to cross him.

The phone rings, James turns back and answers.

NIGHTINGALE
James Nightingale.

CONWAY

Brent Conway.

NIGHTINGALE

Hi- um.

(clicks pen)

I'm a writer for the Pentucket Profile... You're name was in the call records for two of the burglars the night of the break-in.

CONWAY

Awe- what the...

NIGHTINGALE

Would you care to-

CONWAY

I have no comment.

The phone hangs up.

He calls several people, asking around for a minute more. His notes amount to nothing but chicken scratch to us. Nightingale drops his notes in the "notes" tray.

He walks back to his desk and collects himself. Then, he notices Blotty standing over the tray, his papers in hand. Blotty takes them back to his desk.

James creeps to reclaim what's his, with an irritated smile, he asks.

NIGHTINGALE

What're you doing?

BLOTTY

Polishing it.

NIGHTINGALE

Polishing it? What's wrong?

BLOTTY

Nothing- it's good.

NIGHTINGALE

Then what're you doing with it?

BLOTTY

I'm just helping. It's a little fuzzy.

NIGHTINGALE

... Can you give it back?

BLOTTY

I don't think you're saying what you mean.

NIGHTINGALE

I know exactly what I mean.

Blotty lifts his notes.

BLOTTY

Not here. Conway works for Bub or does Bub work for Conway?

NIGHTINGALE

Can I have it?...

Can I have it?

BLOTTY (CONT'D)

Some of the conclusions are off, you-

BLOTTY (CONT'D)

(handing back papers)

I'm not looking for a fight.

NIGHTINGALE

I'm not looking for a fight either.

BLOTTY

I'm just aware that this is your first semester in journalism.

NIGHTINGALE

What does that have to do with anything?

BLOTTY

Well, I've been in the class since freshman year. I've been with the Pentucket Profile since junior.

NIGHTINGALE

What are you trying to say?

BLOTTY

If you read mine, then read yours-

Nightingale snags Blotty's copy of the notes and compares.

BLOTTY (CONT'D)

(as James reads)

I just walked by, saw yours, and figured it had to be refined a little. That first paragraph has to have more clarity.

(MORE)

BLOTTY (CONT'D)

You don't mention Conway's name
'till the third paragraph. I think
mine's better but you go ahead and
read it, if you think yours is
better we'll give it to Mr. Casey.
I've got Conway's name up front.

James continues to read.

BLOTTY (CONT'D)

He's a school administrator and
nobody knows it-

NIGHTINGALE

(engaged)

You're right. Yours is better.

James walks back to his desk, scoops up a handful of papers,
and brings them back to Aidan.

NIGHTINGALE (CONT'D)

If you're gonna do it, do it right.
These are my notes... If you're
gonna hype it, hype it with the
facts. *I don't mind what you did, I
mind the way you did it.*

James walks away, Casey passes.

CASEY

Blotty, Nightingale. You're both on
the story, don't mess it up.

From across the class, Nightingale and Blotty exchange looks.

CUT TO:

INT. PENTUCKET PROFILE ROOM - LATER

Blotty sits at his desk, phone cord across his shoulder.

BUB (OVER PHONE)

Mr. Bub's office.

BLOTTY

This is Aidan Blot from the
Pentucket Profile.

(Googling name, for visual)

My partner was transferred to you
earlier. He was looking to speak
with Mr. Conway.

BUB

Mr. Conway? I don't see him often.

Aidan jots down bullets.

BLOTTY

Right, do you guys... ever cross paths?

BUB

I haven't seen him in a while. The last time I did, we were both offered to supervise a group of like five or six students. I couldn't anyways, so he took the job.

BLOTTY

What did they ask?

BUB

They wanted us to-

BLOTTY

... Hello?

BUB

Hello.

BLOTTY

Sorry, what was that? Who is they?

BUB

... Sorry, I was wrong. The truth is I was never offered a job, neither was Mr. Conway. I don't remember- I do remember getting a job offer but that was a whole other thing... Complete mix-up.

Blotty covers his open ear and jots down more.

BUB (CONT'D)

I don't know a "Mr. Conway."

The call ends.

Blotty stands up immediately and brings his noes over to Nightingale, who is wrapping up a phone call about Conway.

BLOTTY
(passing his notes)
I just talked to Mr. Bub over the
phone, you want to look at the
notes on it?

Nightingale dials Bub's number, Blotty spectates. As the
phone rings, Nightingale points to Blotty's notes.

NIGHTINGALE
This is all one conversation?

BLOTTY
Bub said, first of all "I've been
offered a job with five or six
kids, the same job that Conway was
offered."

NIGHTINGALE
The burglary kids?

BLOTTY
(pointing in agreement)
He comes back two seconds later
saying he doesn't know Mr. Conway.
It's obvious someone got to him.

NIGHTINGALE
We gotta get something on paper.

BLOTTY
Something they forgot to shred.

BLOTTY (CONT'D)
The school budget records.

NIGHTINGALE
Why?

BLOTTY
The money. The burglars didn't
crack a lemonade stand- somebody
greased the wheels.

The two nod and put their jackets on.

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN OFFICE - LATER

Nightingale and Blotty stand before Mrs. Brackbill.

BRACKBILL
 You want all the school budget
 records?... All Pentucket
 transactions are confidential.
 Thank you very much, gentlemen.

The two exit.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

The two enter.

NIGHTINGALE
 The school's papertrail is written
 in invisible ink.

BLOTTY
 A paper trail doesn't have to be
 numbers.

NIGHTINGALE
 What do you mean?

BLOTTY
 I mean, if these guys had a single
 brain cell between the five of
 them, they'd have alibies.

NIGHTINGALE
 No wonder they haven't been
 suspended.

BLOTTY
 Unless you're a bad alibi, you
can't be in two places at once.

NIGHTINGALE
 You said they were in clubs?

BLOTTY
 Student council, government,
 robotics, sports. One of them had
 to have slipped up.

NIGHTINGALE
 Where can we find the attendance
 sheets for those?

BLOTTY
 I know.

The elevator doors open.

CUT TO:

INT. MRS. COSTELLO'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

She looks up at Nightingale and Blotty, happy that someone showed up to the library by choice.

COSTELLO
You want every attendance sheet
since when?

BLOTTY
Uh-

NIGHTINGALE
Since Friday.

COSTELLO
I'm not sure you want them, but
I've got them.

She sets an enormous stack of papers.

Insert: Aerial shot of Blotty and Nightingale's hands flipped thorough each and every single paper, as we rise up towards the ceiling, getting wider and wider.

They exit the library in shambles. Nothing.

INT. BUICK (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

BLOTTY
Not a damn thing- I mean -h-h-how
could there not be a single-

NIGHTINGALE
Wait, wait- Let me just run through
this again. We have call records
tying Conway to the burglars.

BLOTTY
Bub was offered the same job.

NIGHTINGALE
(Confirming)
Bub was offered the same job.

BLOTTY
We need something solid.

NIGHTINGALE

A source.

BLOTTY

... How about we publish what we have, give it a day, and see who bites.

NIGHTINGALE

I like that.

BLOTTY

We'll have to run it by Mr. Seymour. He is the last set of eyes that read an article before the entire district does.

NIGHTINGALE

... We still need one more source.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE - NEXT DAY

Nightingale approaches a payphone and surveys the area.

NIGHTINGALE (OVER PHONE)

This is Nightingale... I want to talk about the burglary. I know ab-

DEEP THROAT

We're not going to talk about that.

NIGHTINGALE

But you told me about-

DEEP THROAT

This is different. Do not contact me by telephone again. If you want to talk, I'll come to you.

The phone hangs up.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHTINGALE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nightingale exits his car, collects his mail, and goes inside. He sits at his coffee table, all the evidence spread across it. We skip over the details, faces, uncertainties.

Eventually, he opens his mail. An index card with an address and time stamp is scribbled. The time is 15 minutes from now.

He guns it. His car hurling down the street. He spirals down the staircase of a parking garage. Nightingale walks through the dark and vacant, nearly empty garage.

We hear a flick, a lighter. Then, we see Deep throat's silhouette beside a pillar. Nightingale approaches.

DEEP THROAT

Where are you?

NIGHTINGALE

Stuck. The story's stalled on us.

DEEP THROAT

And you thought I'd help.
(nodding in disapproval)

NIGHTINGALE

I'd never quote you... I wouldn't quote you even as an anonymous source... You can trust me, you know that.

Nothing.

NIGHTINGALE (CONT'D)

Can you tell me what you know?

DEEP THROAT

You tell me what you know.

Nightingale surveys with just his eyes.

NIGHTINGALE

Conway has something to do with the five burglars.

DEEP THROAT

That should tell you a lot. What else?

NIGHTINGALE

Every paper trail has been covered up, well. The alibis are airtight.

A noise is heard. It's faint, but enough for them to be put on edge. They halt before continuing.

NIGHTINGALE (CONT'D)

Bub got leaned on when we had him on the line, slipped up about getting the same offer we've got Conway sitting on.

DEEP THROAT

Forget the myths and honor about Pentucket and its system... The truth is, there are not very bright guys. Things got out of hand.

NIGHTINGALE

Every one of those kids had hundreds on them in cash-

DEEP THROAT

Follow the money.

NIGHTINGALE

What do you mean? Where?

DEEP THROAT

I can't tell you that.

NIGHTINGALE

... But you could tell me that.

DEEP THROAT

No, I have to do this my way. You tell me what you know and I'll confirm. I'll keep you in the right direction if I can but that's all.

Nightingale waits for more.

DEEP THROAT (CONT'D)

Just, *follow the money.*

CUT TO:

INT. SEYMOUR'S OFFICE - LATER

Nightingale and Blot head to Seymour's, ready to pitch.

SEYMOUR

Alright, what do you guys want?

NIGHTINGALE

We want to publish the preface.

BLOTTY

(handing over papers)

There's a source over at faculty
that suggests there's a whole rats
nest of illegal stuff going on in
the administration.

SEYMOUR

Like what?

NIGHTINGALE

Like a slush fund.

BLOTTY

(elaborating)

Thousands of dollars in unaccounted
cash with no record of transactions
attached...

NIGHTINGALE

We think this is the money that
ended up in the burglar's pockets.

SEYMOUR

Any comments from the
administration?

NIGHTINGALE

(we got them)

No comment.

SEYMOUR

But besides the money. What's the
story?

The two freeze.

NIGHTINGALE

... The money is the key to
whatever this is.

SEYMOUR

Says who?

HONER

Deep throat.

SEYMOUR

Who?

HONER

Oh, well that's Nightingale's
garage freak. His source in the
executive-

SEYMOUR

(angry)

Garage freak? What kind of a crazy story is this?

NIGHTINGALE

Mr. Honer, with all due respect-

SEYMOUR

Casey is pushing for you fellas but to tell you the truth this story is held together by nothing but toothpicks and peanuts. I don't know what kinda story we have if any at all.

BLOTTY

We're looking into a way to trace the money back to Conway other than a paper trail.

NIGHTINGALE

We just haven't had any luck yet.

SEYMOUR

Then get some.

Silence.

SEYMOUR (CONT'D)

We're about to accuse Mr. Conway, who only happens to be the second most important man in this district, of conducting a criminal conspiracy from inside the building. It would be nice if we were right.

Seymour lifts his hands in a "get the hell out fashion."

CUT TO:

INT. PENTUCKET PROFILE ROOM - NEXT DAY

Nightingale and Blotty walk.

BLOTTY

Deven, Owen, Luke, and Kaleb have alibis. But, Brady doesn't.

NIGHTINGALE

I thought you said he's a captain?

BLOTTY
In the fall.

NIGHTINGALE
He wouldn't tell us anything
anyways...

BLOTTY
Right... But I know someone he
would tell.

Kat Flaherty is approached by Nightingale and Blotty, she
finishes up her call and turns to them.

NIGHTINGALE
Don't you go with a guy who's being
looked into for the burglary?

BLOTTY
Brady Jennings?

KAT
Not anymore.

BLOTTY
You did go with him, though?

KAT
Yeah? So...

NIGHTINGALE
You're looking better.

The three have a laugh.

BLOTTY
Look, we need to know where he got
that money from. The money he had
on him during the break-in.

NIGHTINGALE
Do you think that-

KAT
I can't do that.

NIGHTINGALE
Why not?

KAT
It's personal.

BLOTTY

What do you mean? You said it was over.

KAT

You're asking me to use a guy I care about.

NIGHTINGALE

We're just asking you to help us, we'd do the same for you.

Kat is bothered.

KAT

My only chance of getting that is if I see him. I don't want to see him again.

BLOTTY

Do you have to see him?

KAT

Sure I have to see him.

BLOTTY

What, you can't just give him a call? Feel it out a bit? You say the relationship is over, what the hell do you have to lose?

Kat is increasingly bothered. Nightingale notices.

NIGHTINGALE

Forget it... We wouldn't want you to do anything that embarrasses you or you don't feel right about it.

Nightingale gets up and Blotty follows.

BLOTTY

She was gonna say something, had you not dragged it out and overdramatized it? She would have said something.

NIGHTINGALE

It's over.

BLOTTY

What?

NIGHTINGALE

It is over.

CUT TO:

INT. PENTUCKET PROFILE ROOM - NEXT DAY

Nightingale sits at his desk, reading material. A figure glides by and drops a folder on his desk. He opens it up, and reads it, realizing what it is.

He looks across the room. Kat and him exchange looks as she takes a seat. She pulled through.

CUT TO:

INT. CASEY'S OFFICE - LATER

Seymour, Casey, Nightingale, and Blotty surround the folder Kat gave. It is a file of some sort, detailing the transactions between Conway, labeled as "C", and the initials of the five burglars. The title is "Pentucket Reserve Fund"

CASEY

Just what the hell am I looking at?

BLOTTY

(playing into corruption)
The Pentucket Reserve Fund

SEYMOUR

Pentucket Reserve Fund, my foot.

BLOTTY

Some type of ledger that entails
the slush fund.

SEYMOUR

Look at the cash flow on this
thing! Ten thousand, fifteen
thousand, twenty-five thousand!

CASEY

(pointing on paper)
I take it that "C" is for Conway?

NIGHTINGALE

It looks like he's some sort of
under-the-table treasurer in the
operation.

BLOTTY

He's our bagman. We have two sources confirming that.

SEYMOUR

Let me guess- Johnny Appleseed and the Easter Bunny?

BLOTTY

Look, he states at the bottom of the first page that they were given a pair of keys.

Insert: Handwritten note by Brady, saying that the crew was given keys to the central office.

Seymour and Casey hear them out.

NIGHTINGALE

Now why would they use crowbars if they had keys?

BLOTTY

Because they wanted to make the break-in look forceful. A clean job wouldn't sell.

Casey digs it.

SEYMOUR

Conway's the treasurer, no surprise there. But-

(flips paper, pointing)
... who is this "M"?

Insert: Seymour's finger points to an "M" that authorizes the whole document.

NIGHTINGALE

We've got the money trail on Conway, but "M" is the missing link. We don't have that name yet.

BLOTTY

But we can guess he's running the whole thing.

The room absorbs this.

CASEY

(digests, turn to Seymour)
It's a good story, John.

The three look at Seymour with anticipation.

SEYMOUR

We're under a lot of pressure...
But nothings riding on this except
the First Amendment of the
Constitution, freedom of the press
and maybe the future of this
school.

The room waits.

SEYMOUR (CONT'D)

It's a good story, I'll give you
that. But it's not enough.

Bummer.

CUT TO:

INT. BUICK (MOVING) - NIGHT

NIGHTINGALE

When is someone gonna come forward
and say the truth?!

BLOTTY

Everyone is backed to the wall, too
afraid to breathe without someone
twisting it into a headline.

BLOTTY (CONT'D)

You're right. So what about the
people who aren't? The people who
just happened to be close enough to
hear the details.

NIGHTINGALE

You really think someone like
Conway's got the chops to work the
angles on his own? No, not unless
whoever "M" is made sure he was
playin' ball from the start.

NIGHTINGALE (CONT'D)

Don't you think they ever
approached other members of the
student government or council?

BLOTTY

Even if they didn't, Bub's job hunt
ikely made the rounds.

NIGHTINGALE

Student government oversees the transactions of the Student Reserve Fund...

BLOTTY

Who are you thinking?

NIGHTINGALE

Someone who was in the wrong place at the right time heard what we need to know.

BLOTTY

I don't know student reps that we could work... Kate Conover?

They both realize they hit bingo-

Insert: The car bangs a U-Turn

CUT TO:

INT. KATE CONOVER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Insert: Kate's door cracks open, revealing Nightingale and Blotty. They await with nearly zero patience.

The two sit on the couch, clearly out of place with the well-kept Pottery Barn catalog interior. The two try to make themselves comfortable, though in their eagerness it proves to be nearly impossible.

BLOTTY

Thee uh- General Country report says there was well over a hundred thousand dollars in the Pentucket Reserve Fund. Were you aware of those funds from the beginning?

Kate takes her time.

KATE

A lot of people are watching me. They know I know a lot.

NIGHTINGALE

Was it all in hundred-dollar bills?

KATE

A lot of it was... I thought it was an all-purpose event fund. For pep rallies, stuff like that.

BLOTTY

A hundred thousand dollars for a marching band?

NIGHTINGALE

What happened to the list of names?

Blotty takes out a pen, he can't find a notepad so he grabs a paper napkin off of the table.

BLOTTY

This- don't pay any attention to this. This is for my memory.

(nervous laugh)

I have a very bad memory... You wouldn't be quoted by name, so-

NIGHTINGALE

Do you think you could help us with the dispersion of the money? In terms of how many people were involved?

KATE

A handful of them- about three. I don't know their names.

BLOTTY

Mr.-uh, Conway- is one of them?

Kate halts.

BLOTTY (CONT'D)

... Would he have been-

KATE

I don't want to say anymore, okay?

They wait for a beat.

NIGHTINGALE

Look, we don't want to put you in a position where you feel you have to disclose names.

BLOTTY

You know I can just ask you for initials.

(nervous laugh)

And that way you're not divulging any information.

NIGHTINGALE

... Was there an "M"?

Kate nods.

KATE
(overwhelmed)
I don't want to say anymore, okay?

Cue jingle:

BLOTTY
I'm sorry. Can we just go back to-

CUT TO:

INT. BUICK (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

NIGHTINGALE
A hundred and fifty thousand
dollars came into that account over
the course of three days.

BLOTTY
You wouldn't believe what was going
on inside her, something was just
ready to pour out of her- and I'm
pouring down cups of coffee trying
to get it out of her before she
throws me out of the house.

Blot begins to unload crumpled napkins from his pockets.

NIGHTINGALE
Give me your notes.

BLOTTY
These are the notes- I'm writing in
the bathroom while she's getting
coffee- I'm a walking litter
basket.

James tries to read a napkin while driving.

NIGHTINGALE
This is crazy- how am I gonna?-

BLOTTY
You'd be crazy too if you were
operating on twenty cups of coffee.

Blotty grabs a napkin and passes it to Nightingale.

BLOTTY (CONT'D)
Here, "C", "E", and "M".

NIGHTINGALE
 "C", "E", and "M"... "M" could be
 Millard, uh-Maloney, McNamara-

BLOTTY
 "M" is McNamara.

NIGHTINGALE
 How do we know that?

BLOTTY
 (finding the napkin)
 Because she said it... Right here.
 She said, "At the time of the
 break-in, there was so much money
 floating around that she knew
 McNamara would get part of it. I
 said, "You mean Mr. McNamara?" and
 she said, "Yes."

NIGHTINGALE
 Okay, that leaves "E"... That could
 be Elhelw, it could be Endyke-

BLOTTY
 Wait a minute! It could be Erhardt.

They think for half a beat.

NIGHTINGALE
 We have to go back to her house.

James parks the car in front of Blotty's house.

BLOTTY
 (getting out of car)
 She's not gonna give it to us, we
 were with the woman for three hours
 and she didn't-

NIGHTINGALE
 Wait a minute, wait a minute. You
 know what we could do? We go back
 to her house.

Blotty is out of the car, talking through the window.

BLOTTY
 Yeah.

NIGHTINGALE
 And you ask her who "E" is. And I
 say, "No, no. We know "E" is
 Erhardt." I just bury it.

BLOTTY
Wait, wait, wait. So I say to her
"Who is "E"?"

NIGHTINGALE
And I say, "No, we know "E" is
Erhardt."

BLOTTY
You mean we try to fake her out?

NIGHTINGALE
Right.

BLOTTY
And what if she denies it?

NIGHTINGALE
We're screwed.

Blotty gives in, and gets back into his seat.

CUT TO:

INT. KATE CONOVER'S HOUSE - LATER

Kate Conover cracks the the front door open.

KATE
(seeing them)
Oh no, I can't-
(shutting door)

NIGHTINGALE
Please!

BLOTTY
Wait, wait.

Kate halts.

NIGHTINGALE (CONT'D)
We just want to get the facts down
one last time. We want our
reporting to be precise.

BLOTTY
Who is "E"?

NIGHTINGALE
"E" we know is Erhardt- You said a
hundred and fifty grand, is that
how much was in the fund?

Kate stares and nods slowly.

KATE

Yes. It was a hundred and fifty thousand.

Nightingale and Blotty stare at her with conviction.

CUT TO:

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Nightingale heads toward the same shadowed pillow as before, Deep throat awaits.

NIGHTINGALE

Does the school board know what we know?... All of the administration?

DEEP THROAT

If it didn't deal directly with the break-in, they didn't presume.

NIGHTINGALE

Who told them not to?

DEEP THROAT

Don't you understand what you're onto?

NIGHTINGALE

Did Bub know?

DEEP THROAT

Of course, Bub knew. Do you think something of this size just happens?

NIGHTINGALE

Erhardt had to know, too.

DEEP THROAT

(gravelly)

You'll get nothing from me about *Erhardt*.

NIGHTINGALE

... The keys given to the burglars were-

DEEP THROAT

(lighter)

You're missing the overall.

NIGHTINGALE
(fed up)
But what overall?

DEEP THROAT
Two years ago they were frightened
of the last administration and look
who got destroyed. They wanted a
desk to fill and look what
happened.

Nightingale begins to understand.

DEEP THROAT (CONT'D)
They bugged, followed people, false
press leaks, fake letters. They
canceled school committee meetings,
replaced the board. They stole and
shredded documents, on and on.

Nightingale takes it in.

DEEP THROAT (CONT'D)
Now don't tell me you think this is
all the work of McNamara.

NIGHTINGALE
Erhardt, did she know?

DEEP THROAT
... You'll have to find that
yourself.

NIGHTINGALE
Listen, I'm tired of your games! I
don't want hints. I need to know
what you know.

The silence of the echoey lot fills the air for a few beats.

DEEP THROAT
(swallows)
... It was an Erhardt operation.
The whole thing was run by her, the
money, everything. It won't be easy
getting at her, she'll be
insulated.

Nightingale is shocked.

DEEP THROAT (CONT'D)
... Erhardt had McNamara and Conway
doing covert stuff for years.
(MORE)

DEEP THROAT (CONT'D)

This list is longer than anyone can imagine... *It involved the entire Pentucket Regional School District.*

Nightingale frozen.

DEEP THROAT (CONT'D)

Administration, school board, the committee. It's incredible.

NIGHTINGALE

Why? Why did Erhardt do it?

DEEP THROAT

Our leaders sold us out to the highest bidder. Erhardt didn't just want control—she wanted to erase every trace of the past. It's all one big dirty game, and she's holding the cards...Get your notebook out there's more.

CUT TO:

INT. PENTUCKET PROFILE ROOM - NEXT DAY

Blotty walks down the hall beside Nightingale.

BLOTTY

That's it! We don't need another source.

NIGHTINGALE

Not to publish it, technically. But Seymour's gonna want one.

BLOTTY

How many sources do they think we have?

NIGHTINGALE

Call Bub.

BLOTTY

Why?

NIGHTINGALE

(checking watch)

We're twenty minutes from the deadline. Unless you have any better ideas, this is what we're going with.

The two enter a breakout room and Blotty dials Bub.

BLOTTY (INTO PHONE)
Hi, this is Aidan Blot. I'm sorry to disturb you now but we're going with the story that Erhardt is the head of the operation. They're hassling us up here- we got three confirmations, if you could help us we'd appreciate it.

BUB (PHONE)
Look, I won't say anything about Erhardt. Not ever.

BLOTTY
I understand, we wouldn't want you to do that. If there was some way you could warn us to hold on the story-

BUB
I'd really like to help you but I can't.

Blotty thinks.

BLOTTY
Look, I'm gonna count to ten, alright? If there's any reason we should hold on to the story, hangup before I get to ten. If the story is alright just stay on the phone after I get to ten.

BUB
Hang up, right?

BLOTTY
That's right. You got it?

BUB
Yeah.

BLOTTY
Okay, I'm gonna start counting, okay? We're alright?

BUB
Yeah.

BLOTTY
Okay... I'm counting.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- ...
- 10

SILENCE

BUB
We got it straight, man?

Blotty smiles.

BLOTTY
Everything's fine.

He slams the phone into the receiver out of excitement.

He leaves the room and starts running across the room to Nightingale, hollering his name.

NIGHTINGALE
Are we good?

BLOTTY
We're good. Bub confirmed.

NIGHTINGALE
Are you sure?

BLOTTY
Absolutely.

NIGHTINGALE
We got to give it to Seymour.

They snatch up the article and sprint to Seymour's.

They catch him in the elevator, he's leaving.

NIGHTINGALE (CONT'D)

Bub confirmed.

SEYMOUR

If there's any doubt, we can run it tomorrow.

Nightingale has his hand over the elevator door.

NIGHTINGALE

You don't have to, the story is solid. We're sure of it.

BLOTTY

I just got off the phone with him, it's gold.

SEYMOUR

Okay, we go with it.

The elevator doors close.

CUT TO:

INT. PENTUCKET PROFILE HEADS ROOM - LATER

Seymour sits at the end of a table, along with Sherman, Honer, Casey, Ruland, Dziedziak, Siegfried, and Harty.

SEYMOUR

Alright, let's go around once more.

SHERMAN

Pentucket surpasses Triton in rank.

HONER

California Prepares for Massive Storm.

RULAND

NASA Plans Return to Moon

DZIEDZIAK

Pentucket Spring Sports

SIEGFRIED

Wildfires Rage in Western States

HARTY

Chromebook policy restored.

Casey takes a beat.

CASEY
The Erhardt Conspiracy and the
Slush Fund Scandal.

HONER
What is this scandal compulsion
with you?

CASEY
Compulsion? This is a story, not a
compulsion.

HONER
I spoke to a member of the school
board yesterday, and he asked if
this "Slush Fund" story is so
important, then who the hell are
Nightingale and Blotty?

CASEY
Now what do you expect them to say
from the school board? "You're
doing a good job?"

RULAND
(to Seymour)
It's a dangerous story for this
paper...

DZIEDZIAK
What if your guys get it wrong?

Seymour thinks.

SEYMOUR
Then we're toast, aren't we?

SHERMAN
... It's not just the fact that
we're using unnamed sources that
bothers me.

HARTY
Or that everything we print, the
school board denies.

Casey turns to Seymour.

CASEY
You've got a golden ticket here,
John. I know you know that.

It goes quiet for a moment, Seymour scribbles something, then hands it to Casey beside him.

SEYMOUR
I'm not confirming anything, but
I'm not exactly shutting it down
either... This is my non-denial
denial.

Insert: Seymour's note reads "We stand by our story, Seymour"
Seymour looks up.

SEYMOUR (CONT'D)
Fuck it. Let's stand by the boys.

The table exchanges looks.

Cue: Beast of Burden by The Rolling Stones

CUE: MONTAGE 2:

- Copies are printed in bulk
- Mailboxes are filled
- Newspaper hits porches
- Buzz is everywhere
- The paper lands on Erhardts desk
- A new paper of "Conway & McNamara resign!"
- Radio audio of covering the accounts, the details of the corruption filth
- Nightingale and Blotty are attributed to the success
- Students pass the newspaper around like contraband
- Student protesters chant at the office doors

CUT TO:

INT. PENTUCKET PROFILE ROOM - DAY

A Television is in front of us, Nightingale and Blotty clacking away at their desks in the background.

The TV broadcasts "LIVE - Principal Erhardt's Resignation"

The auditorium is packed. Students whisper, and teachers shift uncomfortably. Principal Erhardt stands at the podium, gripping the edges. A deep breath.

The speech has bitter moments with a fake smile plastered across her face, but she keeps her composure.

ERHARDT (TV)

I've spent years doing what I thought was best for this school. And I'll be the first to admit, I've made decisions that not everyone agreed with. I never expected everyone to understand, but I always believed I was doing what was right. Ultimately, if there are those who feel that my actions don't align with their standards—well, let's just say I won't be the one to argue with them anymore. Therefore, I've decided to resign as Principal, effective immediately. This is my decision. No one forced me into it, and I believe it is the right one to make at this time. To those of you who've worked so hard to make this happen, I hope you find what you're looking for. I trust this decision will bring the peace you've been seeking, and I'm sure it will be everything you imagined.

BLOTTY

(shouts across room at TV)
Good riddance!

They continue to work from their desks.

CUT TO:

BLACK

CREDITS