

"FENTANYL WAR"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. EXCLUSIVE VIRGINIA GIRLS' BOARDING SCHOOL- EARLY MORNING

The sun has barely risen. The campus is quiet, peaceful-- an image of idyllic innocence. But there's an eerie stillness that hangs over the dormitory building.

INT. BOARDING SCHOOL-DORMITORY HALLWAY-CONTINUOUS

Footsteps echo in the hallway. Mrs. Anderson, a middle-aged staff member with a warm, motherly demeanor, carries a clipboard as she approaches a closed door. She checks her watch, frowns, and knocks.

MRS. ANDERSON (SOFTLY)
Girls? Time to get up...

No response. She knocks again, a little louder. Still Nothing. A sense of unease starts to creep in.

MRS. ANDERSON (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Girls, you're going to be late for
breakfast...

She hesitates, then tries the doorknob. It turns easily. She pushes the door open and steps inside.

INT. DORM ROOM-CONTINUOUS

The room is dark, curtains drawn. Mrs. Anderson's eyes struggle to adjust. Her breath catches in her throat as she sees the four beds, all occupied, but something is terribly wrong. She approaches the first bed, gently shaking the motionless figure of Jill Harrison, daughter of Edward Harrison, President of the United States.

MRS. ANDERSON (CONT'D)
Jill, sweetheart, wake up...

Jill doesn't move. Mrs. Anderson pulls back the blanket to reveal Jill's pale face, her lips tinged blue. Mrs. Anderson gasps, stumbling backward, her hand flying to her mouth. She rushes to the other beds, one after another, uncovering the same tragic scene, --Julie Harrison--Julie Harrison, the President's other daughter, and two other girls, -- all dead from apparent overdoses.

Mrs. Anderson lets out a bloodcurdling scream.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSCALE GEORGETOWN TOWNHOUSE-LIVING ROOM-7A.M.

David Foster, 40ish, tall, and sharply dressed, stands in his elegant townhouse. He's holding an attache case, but his attention is fixated on the flat-screen TV mounted on the wall. Beside him is his wife Susan, attractive, sophisticated, and visibly shaken. Her eyes are red from crying as she dabs them with a handkerchief.

On the TV Screen:

A well-known News Anchor appears, a look of somber seriousness etched on his face. The words "Breaking News" flash across the top of the screen.

NEWS ANCHOR

We have received, as you just saw and heard, even more shocking information concerning the four students found dead days ago of an apparent accidental overdose fentanyl-laced counterfeit prescription pills.

Susan gasps softly, her eyes widening as the anchor continues.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

The White House has announced that two of the four deceased young ladies at the exclusive Virginia girl's school were the daughters, Jill and Julie, of President and Mrs. Harrison. Apparently, the identities were known shortly after the incident, but the White House only released the information publically at this early morning press briefing today, to give the President and First Lady some private time.

Susan's hand tightens around her hand kerchief as she looks at David, Who remains stoic, though his eyes betray deep sadness.

SUSAN

Well, now the world knows. It still amazes me they were able to keep it quiet until today,

DAVID

It wasn't easy. But the Potus and First Lady had to be given some time before the circus commenced, and they were.

David continues staring at the TV.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Until today, at least.

Susan dabs her eyes again, glancing at the TV before turning back to David.

SUSAN

The President was lucky he had you as a shoulder to cry on. He's called you every night since this happened.

DAVID (SLIGHTLY PEEVED)

I didn't feel like he was crying on my shoulder. I was happy to be there for him. The phone chats were good for me too. And we both know he probably had no one else to talk to. She was barely holding on by her fingernails before this. Who knows where she is at now, but it can't be good.

SUSAN

I hope this doesn't cause her to fall back into the bottle and resume her constant berating of the President. If it wasn't too much for him before, it would be now, the poor man.

DAVID LET'S OUT A SIGH)

Let's hope not. That's the last thing he needs right now. He needs more support, not less.

SUSAN (SOFTLY)

I'm so glad he had you to talk to in those first few nights. Anyone, even the President, would need someone to talk to after a tragedy like this. And if she is drinking, again! I hope not. but the loss of two children would crush even a strong woman. I can't imagine what a loss like that would feel like.

(MORE)

SUSAN (SOFTLY) (CONT'D)

We've just got to hope she doesn't fall apart. But the first Lady is so vulnerable! And the loss of one child would be a nightmare even for a strong person. But two? And with the First Lady's condition? The way the girls died, too. It's so tragic.

DAVID (HURRIEDLY)

Yes, It is. But now, hon, I've got to get to the White House and see how he's holding up. Not to mention the bombshell he's going to drop on the Cabinet this morning.

SUSAN (CONCERNED)

Can't you tell me what it's about, David? I'm so worried. The girls and you've been so secretive about your talks with the President.

David raises his index finger to his lips, his eyes darting around the room as if someone might be eavesdropping.

DAVID (QUIETLY)

No, Sue, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have even told you the little I have. You are better off not knowing. It's going to be a big deal and you already have enough to worry about. And you know how I am.

SUSAN (SIGHS)

/yes, I do. You're paranoid. That's how you are.

David gives her a small smile, then leans in and kisses her forehead.

DAVID

Maybe. But better to be safe than sorry. I'll Call you later.

Susan watches him with a mix of love and concern as he grabs his attache case and heads for the door.

SUSAN

David... be careful.

David smiles reassuringly.

DAVID

Always, hon.

David gives her a final look, then exits the townhouse, leaving Susan standing in the living room, her gaze lingering on the television screen where the news anchor continues to speak.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

...And in other news, the nation remains in shock as details continue to emerge about the tragic deaths of the President's daughters. The White House has yet to announce information on any possible law enforcement investigation on how the four dead girls acquired the fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills that resulted in these tragic deaths. It is well known that these type of pills, which are indistinguishable from legitimate opiate prescription pills received from a pharmacy, are produced by the millions in clandestine labs in Mexico and are also made here in the USA using Fentanyl smuggled here from Mexico. It is believed that over one hundred thousand young people have lost their lives to this insidious, criminal plague.

Susan slowly sits, a sinks into the couch, her hand toying with the remote as she stares blankly at the TV, the weight of the tragedy dominating her thoughts.

FADE to new scene

INT. NATIONAL CATHEDRAL-DAY

The majestic interior of the National Cathedral is filled with mourners, their faces etched with grief. The towering arches and stained glass windows bathe the place in a somber reverent light. The organ plays a slow, mournful hymn as the CAMERA PANS over the gathered crowd. Among them are high-ranking government officials, foreign dignitaries, military officers and and close friends of the Harrison family.

At the front of the cathedral , two identical, white caskets rest side by side, draped in American flags. Flanking them are large, elegant floral arrangements, a sea of white lillies, roses and orchids. An honor guard stands solemnly nearby, their faces stoic and composed.

President Harrison and the First Lady, dressed in black, sit in the front pew. The First Lady's face is pale, her complexion sallow, and her eyes red and swollen from days of crying. There's a slight tremor in her hand as she clutches a handkerchief, occasionally dabbing at her eyes. Her appearance is of a woman barely holding it together, the toll of grief compounded by a fragile state.

The President sits beside her, his face a mask of sorrow, holding her hand in a show of love. He glances at her, concern flickering in her eyes, aware of her delicate condition. Directly behind them, David and Susan sit. David, his expression grave as he glances occasionally at the President, his concern for the man evident. The bond between the two is palpable, a silent understanding that the loss is shared, though felt most deeply by the President.

The Vice President and other senior officials sit nearby, their expressions somber, as they, too, mourn the loss of the President's daughters. THE CAMERA ZOOMS IN ON THE President's face, capturing the depth of his pain and the weight of the responsibility he feels. His eyes are hollow, reflecting a grief only a parent can know.

As the hymn comes to an end, a PRIEST steps forward to the pulpit. He opens his bible and looks out over the attendees. As he begins to talk, his voice is filled with empathy and sorrow.

PRIEST (SOLEMNLY)

We gather here today to honor the
the lives of Jllian and Julia
Harrison, two bright and beautiful
souls taken from us far too soon.
They were daughters, friends, and
loved by all who knew them. Their
passing leaves a void that can
never be filled....

The President's gaze drifts to the caskets, his face hints that his-- mind is racing with memories of his daughters. He squeezes the First Lady's hand, which t shakes slightly.

The priest continues his eulogy, but the mourners all seem to be lost in their own thoughts.

The camera pans to David, worry etched on his face, who watches the President closely. The President gazes lovingly at his wife, whose fragility is obvious. As the final hymn begins to play, the President's face hardens with resolve.

PRIEST (LAST OF THE EULOGY) (CONT'D)
May their souls find peace and
their loved ones find the strength
to carry on in their memory.

The organ music swells as the final notes of the hymn echo through the cathedral. The congregation slowly rises as the honor guard steps forward to carry the caskets out of the cathedral, with the President and First Lady following closely behind.

THE CAMERA FOLLOWS them as they make their way outside, where a line of black limousines awaits. The President pauses at the door of his car, looking at the honor guard and the caskets, as they approach the hearse, his expression a mixture of grief and determination. The President holds the First Lady's arm, helping her into the limousine, as her entire body visibly shakes now and she is wracked with sobs.

FADE OUT

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM ADJACENT TO THE OVAL OFFICE-DAY

The scene opens with a view of a large, imposing conference room just off the Oval Office. The room is dominated by a long, polished, wooden conference table surrounded by high-backed chairs. Seated around the table are the President's Cabinet, along with other high-level advisors. Each seat has a nameplate on the table in front of it identifying the occupant's role.

*Dianne Taylor- Vice President.

*Lucy Rogers- Press Secretary.

* General Marks- Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

*Mr. Lindsey- FBI Director.

*Mr. Perkins- Director- CIA.

*Mr. Caldwell-Administrator- D. E.A.

* Mr. Carter-Attornry General.

* Mr. Kellerman- Defense Secretary.

In addition to the personalized name plates, in front of each participant is a glass of water, a pen, notebook, and a selection of pertinent papers removed from their briefcases. At the head of the table sits President Harrison, his expression grave but composed. David Foster is seated to his immediate right, a reassuring presence at his side.

The room hums with a sense of anticipation and unease as the President clears his throat, signaling the start of the meeting. The talk quiets, and all eyes turn toward the President.

PRESIDENT (SERIOUS TONE)

Thank you all for coming. I've asked you all to be here today because each of you brings unique, essential, expertise and familiarity with the issue we are about to discuss.

The President pauses, glancing around the room, making eye contact with each person. His gaze lingers on the Press Secretary, who nods subtly in acknowledgement.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

As you know, this fentanyl epidemic has hit close to home. Ahhh... Sniffle... So I have to tell you that David and I have been discussing this plague every night recently and what we might do about it before more young American lives are lost

The President raises his voice

And now that I Have decided to act, it is going to be your jobs to formulate the how of implementing my decision.

The Vice President looking alarmed , begins to speak but is stopped by the President's raising of his hand.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Dianne, I know what you are about to ask and I will jump right into an answer. Yes, I have decided that an incursion into Mexico to eliminate these Cartel bosses and their poison-producing laboratories is way overdue. And that is what I intend to order today.

The President looks toward the Atty General.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Paul, I know you and David have had discussions, Can you tell us what you have found? Hopefully, to alleviate some of the anxiety I feel my decision has created around the table.

There are uncomfortable clearings of the throat and other subtle noises around the table. The Atty General stands, papers in his hands and faces the President.

ATTY. GENERAL

Mister President and my colleagues, the Justice Department has confirmed that you have the authority to initiate this action, as long as you are convinced there is an imminent threat to the American people. And if you so do, you will be fully within your rights to initiate such an undertaking under your Executive Action authority.

The room is still, the gravity of the situation sinking in. General Micharls, sitting a few seats from the President, shifts in his chair before speaking, his tone cautious.

GENERAL MARKS

Mister President, a direct military operation in Mexico--it's fraught with risk. The potential for The operation would be difficult,

Others around the large table, express their reservations and concerns, about not only the military feasibility of such an undertaking but also the likely prospect of negative domestic and foreign fallout from it,

The President nods, his expression hardening as he listens to the words of caution and uncertainty from his Cabinet. The President motions for David to speak.

DAVID

The General is right --This won't be an easy task, that is for sure. But the situation demands action.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

This isn't just about the tragic loss of the President's daughters--this is about the 100,000 who have already died because of this poison, and even more importantly, to prevent the untold number of deaths of American young people, which is sure to occur, if action isn't taken.

There are nods and murmurs of agreement from around the table. Vice President Dianne Taylor, a composed and capable individual, leans forward slightly, her tone supportive, but still, a bit cautious.

VICE PRESIDENT TAYLOR

We all understand the urgency, sir. But we need to ensure that any action taken will be well-coordinated between all our agencies, the risk-reward factor acceptable,, and of course, it must be successful.

The President, after listening intently to the words, clears his throat to speak. Although his face is a mask of determination, his voice, when he speaks, is laced with grief but also with a firm resolve.

PRESIDENT

I do want to be clear about one thing--this isn't about revenge on my part. I am not doing this to avenge the deaths of Jillian and Julia. As much as I am getting pressure in this direction on the home front, this is not what this is about. Again, and to emphasize, this is about preventing, possibly thousands, of other parents, from going through the loss my family has suffered. And, As this is in my power, I must act. I would be derelict in my duties, and obligations to the American people, if I did not.

The room is silent, the weight of the President's words pressing down on everyone. The Press Secretary, Lucy Rogers, who has been silently taking notes, looks up, her expression one of deep concern.

PRESS SECRETARY ROGERS (CAREFULLY)

Mr. President, the public will need to understand the full scope of the danger we are facing and the necessity of the action you are commencing. We have to be prepared for the backlash, both from within our land and internationally, even including our partners. We must get the public on board with this.

The President looks from the Press Secretary to the Vice President, and then moves to glance at each face in the room.

PRESIDENT

Thank you, ladies. And that is why I am asking everyone here to return to our next meeting with a complete plan of action in regards to their agency's role in this endeavor. Legal, Military, diplomatic, public relations, /intelligence. Exactly how your agency will contribute to the success of this operation. We'll figure out how to do this and do it right. /i demand that much from everyone here.

The President looks toward David.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

David will coordinate this between now and our next meeting. ?i'd like everything all ironed out by the time we meet again. If there are any questions or concern, David will be who you will get in touch with. He will also be my eyes and ears on this. /you may consider that you are addressing me when you talk to him Their are no off topics. You can speak of anything you wish about this project with him.

DAVID (QUIETLY)

?yes Sir, We are all with you and it will be done.

There are murmurs of agreement from those present. The President stands and gives a small, almost imperceptible nod, a silent acknowledgment of the bond between him and David. The room remains heavy with the gravity of what has been discussed. The President walks toward the door.

The meeting members, following behind the President, exchange serious glances amongst themselves as they leave the room.

THE PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM-WHITE HOUSE LIVING QUARTERS-NIGHT

The camera pans across the dimly lit bedroom in the White House living quarters. The room is large, elegantly furnished with a mixture of antique and modern touches. The only sound is the faint ticking of a clock on the wall.

President Harrison, still dressed in his shirt and tie, sits on the edge of the bed, his shoulders slumped, his face a mask of exhaustion. His hands are locked tightly together, knuckles white, as he stares at the floor.

Across the room, First Lady, Margaret Harrison, paces back and forth. A half-empty tumbler glass of bourbon in one hand. Her other trembles as she runs it through her disheveled hair. Her face is flushed, her eyes red and puffy from crying. The evidence of her out of control drinking is unmistakable-- an empty wine bottle lies on its side on the floor, a pool of dark liquid has stained the expensive carpet.

MARGARET (VOICE SHAKING)

How can you just sit there, Edward?
Our daughters are dead...murdered
by those monsters--and you just...
sit there!

The President flinches at her words but remains silent, struggling to maintain his composure. Margaret takes a swig from the tumbler, her eyes wild with grief and anger.

MARGARET (ALMOST HYSTERICAL) (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ, Edward. You are the
President of the United States!
?you have the power to do
something, to make them pay! And
yet...nothing. How can you do
nothing?

She hurls the empty tumbler across the room. /it smashes against the wall, shattering into pieces. The President finally looks up, his eyes filled with pain but also an aura of tolerance and love for the woman he married.

PRESIDENT (SOFTLY)

Margaret... I'm not doing nothing.
I'm doing everything I can,
everything within my power to make
this right.

Margaret stumbles to the bed and collapses onto it, sobbing uncontrollably, the President moves to her side, gently pulling her into his arms. She clings to him, her body shaking as she cries into his chest.

MARGARET (CHOKING ON HER SOBS)
They were our babies, Edward... our beautiful girls. How can I go on without them?

The President strokes her hair. He fights to hold his own welling tears.

PRESIDENT (QUIETLY)
There are things in motion, Margaret. I can't go into detail, but I promise you...this will be resolved. They will not get away with it. But you have to trust me, please. As the President, I have to act for the benefit of all our citizens and not just to satisfy my own emotion, no matter how inflamed they may be. So, I need you to hold on just a little longer. Please for me. For the girls. For our country.

Margaret looks at him her eyes searching, hoping. She nods slowly, her hand grasps his.

MARGARET (WHISPERING)
I'll try, Edward. But it's hard... and I'm scared. Very scared.

The President gently squeezes her hand, his voice firm, yet tender.

PRESIDENT
I know, sweetheart. But you're strong. Stronger than you realize. We'll get through this. Together.

Margaret leans into him, closing her eyes, hopefully finding comfort in his words and embrace. The President stares off, thoughtful.

The camera slowly zooms out, leaving the couple in their embrace. The softly ticking clock is the only noise as the screen fades to black.

OVAL OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

The camera opens on the familiar setting of the Oval Office Conference Room. The large table, in addition to what it held during the previous meeting, is now covered with folders, maps and documents spread out before the assembled officials, again all seated, in the same seats as at their previous conference with name plates in front of them identifying the agency they represent: JOINT CHIEFS of STAFF, FBI, CIA, DEA, DEFENSE DEPT., JUSTICE DEPT., PRESS SECRETARY, vice president, along with others.

President Harrison, as previously, sits at the head of the table, his expression grim. David, again, is at his side. The younger man is focused and alert. The Tension in the room is palpable as the meeting is about to begin. President Harrison stands. Some of the others begin to follow suit until the President motions them to remain seated.

PRESIDENT (CALM BUT STERN)

I want to thank you all for coming. I know you weren't given much time to formulate your individual contributions for this venture. Yet, as David has been keeping me abreast of everyone's progress, I think it is safe to assume, even though I heard there were a few hiccups, the bulk of your plans of action were completed. So, alright. Let's hear it! Where do we stand? General, would you like to begin?

General Marks, representing the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stands up. He's a seasoned military man, as medals, ribbons and insignia on his uniform confirm. He is in his sixties, with a look of confidence mixed with gravity of what is about to unfold.

GENERAL MARKS (SERIOUS BUT COMMANDING VOICE)

Mr. President, the military is ready. We've planned a course of action down to the last detail. As you may know, I have communicated all this to your Chief of Staff, Mr, Foster. Delta force and other participating specialized units are undergoing training as we speak. All will be ready when you decide to proceed.

(MORE)

GENERAL MARKS (SERIOUS BUT

All efforts to limit civilians from collateral damage will be taken, as you requested through Mr. Foster. All involved units will be awaiting the green light from you, Sir. Targets have been identified, and our strike capabilities are primed to neutralize the threats with the utmost precision.

The General hands a folder to the President, , who flips through it nodding. N

Next, the heads of the CIA, FBI, and DEA each present their reports. The CIA Director, a sharp-eyed woman in her 50's, is the first to speak.

CIA DIRECTOR (CONFIDENT, WITH A SLIGHT YANKEE ACCENT)

Mr. President, we have forwarded to General Marks and other necessary agencies key cartel locations, both laboratories, the homes of kingpins, safe houses, storage, and other planning centers and other relevant locations. Our contacts are deep within cartel organizations and compromised Mexican government, and private sector, institutions. This information has been passed on to Defense, Justice and other agencies where necessary.

The FBI DIRECTOR, a stern man in his 60's, nods in agreement but stands to make his own point.

FBI DIRECTOR (ANGRILY)

Our sources have corroborated Langley's intel, but I need to stress that our sources of information are just as vital to the success of this mission as any other agencies. We've shared our info with Defense, , and other appropriate agencies. But we must be assured that our sources are treated with the same protection as Langley's. It is a priority of ours to give them maximum protection. And denigrating their value does not help that goal.

The DEA ADMINISTRATOR, a tough -looking man in his 50's, leans forward, and interjects, his voice sharp.

DEA ADMINISTRATOR

I have received word that my colleagues, the previous two speakers have been denigrating our work and sources of information south of the border. I must emphasize, Mr, President, that we have been active and cultivating these sources for many years and they are of the highest quality and must be protected as such. I do not appreciate anyone, including these two, agencies trying to downplay our CI's worth in an effort to prop up the less than sterling quality of their own. , And I might add, they both have had many informants who have been linked to more criminal activity than investigation targets in many instances.

The room grows tense as the friction between the three alphabet agencies becomes clear. The CIA DIRECTOR GLARES at his DEA counterpart. He is ready to respond, but the President cuts in, slamming his fist down on the table, startling everyone.

PRESIDENT (SNGRILY)

Enough! I won't have any petty rivalry jeopardize the success of this mission, You'll work together W're all on the same side here. I don't care whose informants or intel is more important... you'll work together, or heads will roll. Do I make myself clear?

The room falls silent, the offenders chastened, nod in agreement with the President and mutter apologies.

David Foster motions to the president for permission to speak. When the President nods, Foster stands.

DAVID (CONCILLATORY TONE)

We've been coordinating everything to make sure no detail, regardless of its source, is overlooked.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONCILLATORY TONE) (CONT'D)

Every piece of intelligence, every strategy, has been scrutinized and correlated with all others so this operation isv sure to run like well-oiled machine. This has to go off without a hitch. We can't afford any hiccups. So we have to work as a united front... as one! Nothing else will do. We must carry out the President's orders. And I will insure that we do!

The officials, around the table, nod in agreement, the weight of what they are undertaking finally sio\nking in. The PRESS SECRETARY, a composed woman in her late 30's, clears her throat. The President nods and she stands.

PRESS SECRETARY ROGERS

Mr. President, My team and I have come to the conclusion that it would be wise for you to address the nationlive, from the oval Office, The best time would be just as the operation begins or shortly thereafter. Of course, the timing will take into account the secrecyand element of surprise I've been told it needs. So only minutes after action commences would be the optimum time. It is crucial that the American people, and the world, understand what we are doing and why we are doing it. We will need as much domestic and foreign support as we can get. We must frame this action as thwarting a clear and present danger to the United States and its citizens. Also, in that vein, as has been the custom, we believe this endeavor should be referred to as "Operation Save the Children."

The President considers her words, nodding slowly. He looks around the table, from face to face, please with the determination he sees.

PRESIDENT (DECISIVE)

We'll do it! Coordinate with the networks, General Marks and David. We will begin the broadcast as the action has begun, so as not to lose the element of surprise.

(MORE)

PRESIDENT (DECISIVE) (CONT'D)

Operation Save the Children is a go as of this moment. All of you do your jobs, coordinate with David, and he with your assistance will put the whole plan into a sequence of events. David will keep me informed, of course of the progress of what we are instigating. And remember...I expect total committment. Again, this has little to do with my daughters and everything to do with saving the precious lives of untold numbers of our youth!

The camera slowly zooms out, as the officials pack up their papers and folders, their faces a mix of determination and anxiety, as the file from the room. The Room fades to black, hopefully leaving a sense of excitement and apprehension as to what is soon to come.

(CONT'D)

EXT. CARLOS RIVERA'S FINCA- MEXICO- DAY

The camera opens with a sweeping shot of CARLOS RIVERA'S luxurious finca, nestled in an area surrounded by mountains.

The finca is a well-appointed estate,, exuding old-world charm, with its Spanish architecture, red-tiled roof and its expansive verandas facing manicured and well cared for gardens.

INT. RIVERA FINCA, LIVING ROOM-DAY

Inside the grand, high-ceilinged living room, Carlos Rivera, 40ish, ruggedly handsome with a commanding presence,

, sits comfortably in an antique leather chair. Sitting at his feet are his two sons, Alejandro(10) and Miguel (8), both bright eyed and eager. . Carlos is reading to them from a well-worn book on Mexican history. , his deep voice resonating with warmth as he shares his beloved stories of their heritage.

Carlos (reading from the book)"And so, the great Emiliano Zapata led his people fighting for their rights, for their land, against those who would take everything from them..."

The boys stare adoringly at their father, hanging on every word, Their admiration for him is apparent, as they lean in close, soaking in the tales of bravery and revolution.

ALEJANDRO (EXCITED)

Papa, Will we fight for our people too, like Zapata?

Carlos smiles warmly at the boys.

CARLOS

We fight in different ways, Mijo. But remember, we must always protect our family and our people.

As Carlos closes the book, ISABELLA, his beautiful and elegant wife, enters the room. Her expression is one of quiet concern as she watches her husband with their sons. Despite the warmth of the scene, there is an undercurrent of tension.

ISABELLA (TO CARLOS, THE BOYS NOT LISTENING)

They love hearing your stories, Carlos, but still,... I worry about their future.

Carlos looks at her. Realizing the seriousness of her words.

HE STANDS UP, AND APPROACHES HER, PLACING A EASURRING HAND ON HER SHOULDER.

CARLOS (SOFTLY)

I know, Mi Amor. I worry too. Every day I worry. This life... it's not what I wanted for us.

ISABELLA (PLEADING)

Then why continue, Carlos? We have more than enough money. Why not find a way out before it's too late?

Carlos glances at his sons, who are now playing with toy soldiers on the floor. They seem oblivious to the serious adult talk.

CARLOS (SIGHING)

We have spoken of this many times, my love, and you know it is not that easy. There are many people who depend on me and my business...their families depend on this to survive. And, besides,we're in too deep now.I have many commitments and obligations. But... I will try again, Isabella, to find a way out of this safely for all of us.

isabella's beautiful black eyes sparkle withb a flicker of hope.

ISABELLA

Oh Carlos, that is all I ask. Do you promise you will try to find a way to release us all from this unnecessary danger?
Carlos pulls her close and burys his face in her long black hair.

CARLOS (SINCERELY)

/i promise, my love. I don't know how it will turn out, But I will do my best. You have my word.

The tension eases a bit and i/sabella's full lips form a slight smile. Just then, Raul, Carlos' right-hand man, enters the room. A man of few words, but you see right away you would not want to cross him, even if he didn't have the M-16 automatic rifle he cradles in his arms.

His face, though hard, and hinting at engaging in many battles in the past, still, his eyes gaze over protectively of each of the family members. -- the boys, isabella, and, of course, Jefe, Carlos, his admired boss.

Raul signals to Carlos that they must talk . The men huddle.

RAUL (QUIETLY)

Carlos, I have news. There are troubling rumors. The /yanquis... they might be planning something against the cartels. Here, on our side of the border.

Carlos'eyes flash with anger and concern

CARLOS

I can not believe that, Raul. They would not dare.

RAUL

I would usually agree with you, Jefe, but there is too much talk coming from many different directions. I do not like it.

Now Carlos expression is all angry and even though he speaks quietly, that anger and the determination in his coice is undeniable.

CARLOS

Check with our people in Mexico City and also north of the border. Tell them I demand to know what is going on. We bhavve paid them all fortunes to guarantee that we are never caught with our pants down. And Raul, tell that /i said, if we are, they will have their cocks cut off and stuffed in their mouths.

Raul nods in acceptance.

RAUL OMINOUSLY)

They will understand, Carlos. I will make sure of that.

The look on his face is one of steely resolve.

CARLOS

I know you will, my friend. /you have never let me down. Tell me as soon as you have any information.

Raul nods, and excuses himself from the room.

EXT. USA/ MEXICAN BORDER-NIGHT, TWO WEEKS LATER.

The wind howls as military vehicles move about in controlled chaos across desert terrain. Low-flying helicopters, their searchlights raking the ground, kick up dust as they jockey for their assigned position.

David Foster stands beside General Marks, both men surveying the scene. David, in combat gear, looks every bit the Navy Seal, he once was, looks sharp and ready. The General glances at his wristwatch.

GENERAL MARKS (GRAVELY)
We're five minutes out Mr. Foster.

DAVID
And i will be embedded with the group going to Rivera's home?

GENERAL MARKS (SKEPTICALLY)
This is not standard procedure, but the President has requested you be given all assistance, and to be with the team that takes down Rivera was a specific order from the Commander in Chief. But if it were up to me...

DAVID (SHARPLY)
But it is not, General. The counterfeit pills that killed the President's daughters have been traced to a Rivera organization lab. My assignment is to make sure Rivera doesn't slip through our fingers and that he is taken alive, if possible. The President wants Rivera brought back to the United States to face justice.

General Marks still appears doubtful.

GENERAL MARKS
I don't know, Mr. Foster. That's a tall order. I am aware of your service with the Seals, so you are familiar with how volatile these actions can be. Rivera is liable to resist and then there will be a hornet's nest.

(MORE)

GENERAL MARKS (CONT'D)

I can't let any of my men to be endangered if he isn't taken out.

DAVID

Of course General, I understand, and believe me, yje President would not expect you to not protect your men. ?you msy due what you have to do.

GENERAL MARKS (FLUMMOXED)

Good! Otherwise, Mr. Foster, we would have a problem.

The sound of a Humvee approaching cuts through the night. /it stops in front of David and the General. A captain jumps out. He has a field radio strapped to his body,, He runs up to the General, salutes.

CAPTAIN

Sir, ?i Have visited all teams. Everything is set to go . Just waiting on your order.

General Marks looks urgently at David.

GENERAL MARKS

/here we go , Mr. Foster. You better let him know.

David reaches into a small duffel he carries and pulls out a secure satelite phone. He steps a few feet from the General and presses one key.

DAVID (INTO THE PHONE)

It's Foster. We are moving in. Now!

David Foster listens intently to the phone,

DAVID (INTO THE PHONE) (CONT'D)

Yes Mr. President, you can begin your address. We are on the move!

A helicopter lands not far in front of the General and David. The General gives a wave of his hand to the captain.

CAPTAIN (BARKS INTO THE FIELDS RADIO)

Go, go. The General has ordered all units to move out. God Bless, Gentlemen.

General Marks claps a hand on David's shoulder.

GENERAL MARKS

You better have your head on straight, Foster. This could get messy.

DAVID (DETERMINED, EYES SURVEYING THE
CHAOTIC SCENE)

Messy's what I do best, General.

David and the captain follow the General to the nearest helicopter. They get in and, along with others, it lifts off. Simultaneously, occupied troop trucks, and various military vehicles lurch forward. Operation Save the Children has begun.

INT. OVAL OFFICE- NIGHT

The Oval Office is in a state of controlled chaos with cables, camera equipment, and bustling technicians. Several TV cameras are positioned at different angles, all pointing toward the President, who sits resolutely at his desk. He looks tired but determined. , the weight of the moment etched on his face. A makeup artist dabs powder on his face. He seems slightly annoyed. Press Secretary stands at his side reviewing last-minute notes and offering quiet, confident guidance.

The Press Secretary moves in closer to the President and speaks quietly but firmly.

PRESS SECRETARY ROGERS

Keep it steady, Mr. President.
Focus on the Children. Stay composed. /you're not just speaking to America... You're speaking to the world tonight. For many this will be their first impression of you. And we know what they say about first impressions... very important. The President, a bit frustrated waves away the Press Secretary and makeup artist.

PRESIDENT

Please, both of you, stop fussing over me.

A technician approaches the President, giving a signal that they are about to go live. The President adjusts his tie and clears his throat. The makeup artist hurrys away and the Press Secretary takes two steps to the side, allowing the President a last moment of solitude.

He stares intently at the teleprompter screen, gives his lips a quick swipe with his tongue.

The white lights on the cameras start blinking. A technician, wearing a headset, begins a countdown, indicating each number, with a corresponding finger, as he says it.

TECHNICIAN.

Ten...Nine....Eight...Seven...Six..
.Five...Four...Three...

The President takes a deep breath. The room is silent except for the slight hum of equipment. The President glances at the Press Secretary, who gives a silent nod of encouragement. The technician continues his countdown.

TECHNICIAN. (CONT'D)

Two...One...

The President lasers in on the camera, as the technician gives a slashing motion with his hand, indicating to the President to begin. The red camera light goes on and grows brighter as the announcer's voice comes faintly through a speaker.

ANNOUNCER (O.S)

From the Oval Office, the President
of the united States.

The room stills, as the announcer's mic is cut. The world is now listening and watching.

PRESIDENT (STEADY AUTHORITY, LOOKING
DIRECTLY INTO THE CAMERA)

Good Evening, American and Mexican citizens, along with people of the world, I come tonight to speak of a great tragedy but also, a hope of avoiding repeating this tragedy in the future. As you may have already surmised, I am speaking of a great plague that has infected our land... I speak of that great poison...Fentanyl and other synthetic drugs that have claimed the lives of over 100,000 of our precious sons and daughters. These drugs, some made to look like legitimate prescription medicines, sre manufactured ,distributed and smuggled into the /united States by ruthless cartels.

(MORE)

PRESIDENT (STEADY AUTHORITY, LOOKING
Have ripped through our comm
ubities, stealing the futures of
our precious children.

) Pauses, takes a deep breath)
Despite our repeated best efforts,
for years now, to stop the flow of
these deadly substances through our
own interdiction efforts and
numerous appeals to the Mexican
authorities to act against them,
the cartels have only grown more
powerful, more ruthless, and more
determined to continue this evil
trade, with its destruction of our
youth. And s, If they are allowed
to continue, countless numbers of
our children will have their
futures stolen from them. And As
President, I can not allow that to
happen. And as we have exhausted
all peaceful means to vanquish this
evil trade... I have only one
option... As I speak American
military forces , along with
personal from other departments
, are, as i speak entering our
southern neighbor, Mexico, for the
sole purpose of capturing cartel
leaders, destroying their
laboratories, and dismantling their
infrastructure. This is the sole
purpose of "Operation Save the
Children,"

) pauses, his tone softening slightly)
To the citizens of Mexico, I want
to be perfectly clear. I can assure
you , you have nothing to worry
about. Our mission is not against
you, but only the criminals who
have terrorized both of our
nations. I do advise you to please
stay far from any locations known
to be cartel connected. This is for
your own safety. I can assure you
we will be staying only as long as
necessary, Once cartel leaders are
apprehended and the drug
infrastructue destroyed, we will be
withdrawing.

The President leans forward slightly, his tone becoming more
urgent.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

I must say to any compromised police or military units who may attempt to interfere, I have instructed our Generals to destroy anything or anyone who poses a threat to our boys.

The President pauses, his tone shifts to one of empathy.

I want to assure the law-abiding people of Mexico, which I know constitute the vast majority of that proud, beautiful nations people, that my office has been in contact with President Diaz's administration to keep them abreast of what we are undertaking. We have made it clear that this is a one-time, limited operation. Our goal is simple-- to save the lives of countless young people and ensure that this filthy trade is stamped out once and for all.

The President briefly glances at his notes, then continues with a tone of finality.

The President briefly glances at his notes, then continues with a tone of finality

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

So, in conclusion, I hope everyone listening understands that I can not stand idly by as another 100,000 children are lost to this epidemic. To do so would be shirking my sworn duty. I take this action reluctantly, yet with the knowledge that it is the right thing to do.. not only for for the safety of our nation and children, but to ensure that they both realize their bright futures.

The President pauses giving dramatic effect to what he has just said, and then closes.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Thank you, good night, and God bless our troops and God bless the united States of America.

The supervising technician signals Cut and the red camera light dims. The Technicians waste no time in breaking down their equipment and putting the Oval Office back to its usual condition.

The Press Secretary moves to stand beside the President and place a hand on his shoulder.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Well done, Sir. Fantastic. This talk will be remembered by future generations.

The President shrugs, resigned, as he stares into the distance.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

I only pray that it is for the right reasons.

The scene fades out.

INT. FORTIFIED SAFE ROOM-NIGHT

The room is dimly lit. The walls, made of concrete, are lined with shelves stacked with the basic staples for survival. Carlos, Isabella, Alejandro, and Miguel are seated on chairs, huddled together, tense. Carlos obviously, very worried. Isabella's eyes are red and puffy. The boys are terrified. Raul, armed with an automatic rifle, paces the room, listening intently to a headset, communicating with cartel soldiers guarding the finca perimeter.

Carlos, keeping his voice low, to not alarm his family, speaks to Raul.

CARLOS

Will the Yanquis...be Human enough to give my family safe passage away from here?

Raul appears uncertain and, before he can answer, a phone on the wall buzzes noisily. Raul answers the device, listens.

RAUL (FURIOUS.)

Estupido! I will kill him with my bare hands. He slams the phone back on to its wall mount. Then speaks to an anxious Carlos.

RAUL (CONT'D)

It is too late, Jefe. Some idiota disobeyed my orders and fired on the approaching Yanquis. A number of them have been hit.

Isabella gasps. Carlos looks shocked.

As if on cue, the sound of muffled heavy machine gun fire can be heard from above. Followed by a loud, ear-shaking explosion.

Raul, again speaks quietly to Carlos, so as to not alarm Isabella and the boys, who are already trembling in fear. The lights flicker for a few seconds.

Raul

They are trying to breach the gates. Our men will not be able to repel them. There are too many and with too much firepower. The boys, Miguel and Alejandro, cling to Isabella, wild-eyes with fear. Isabella pulls them closer, trying to comfort them but she is visibly trembling.

Carlos looks at his family his face a mix of guilt, fear and desperation. He crosses the room, kneels in front of the boys, taking their hands.

CARLOS (FEIGNING CALM)

It's going to be okay. We're safe down here.

Isabella bites her lip, tears threatening to spill. She glances at her boys, and then to Carlos, fear in her eyes.

ISABELLA (WHISPERS)

Carlos, what if...

Carlos offers a reassuring smile, though the knuckles of his clasped hands, turn white.

CARLOS (ALSO WHISPERS TO ISABELLA)

I will find a way to safety. I promise.

The rumble of another explosion, along with even more intense gunfire. The boys flinch, and Isabella gathers them closer.

Raul straightens, looks up. To Carlos he speaks, in a determined tone.

RAUL

I must get you out of here. I must see what is happening. Stay with your family. I shall return shortly.

Carlos gazes fondly at his right-hand man.

CARLOS

Be careful, my amigo.

Raul exits the room. Carlos secures the door after him.

Carlos goes and sits beside his family, gathering them in his arms. He looks back and forth between the faces of his family and the door Raul has left by. The camera stays on Carlos, looking torn between his role as Cartel leader and loving family man.

INT. SAFE ROOM-FINCA-NIGHT

Thirty minutes later, There is a coded knock at the door. Carlos opens it. Raul steps inside, agitated. He motions them all to follow him. He speaks openly to Carlos

RAUL

Quick, Jefe, I have a way to safety.
There is not much time. Up the
stairs and into the living room.

CARLOS

Now, Isabella. Boys. Pronto!

The little family, terrified, follows Raul from the safe room, up a flight of stairs, and through the door into the living room.

INT. MAIN LIVING ROOM-FINCA-NIGHT

Raul leads Carlos, Isabella, and the two boys into the main living room. The once opulent space is now in ruins. Furniture toppled. Dust hanging in the air.

Raul points at the ceiling, talks loudly to Carlos.

RAUL

Commandos have tried to blow a hole
in the roof to enter, Jefe.

Gunfire cracks outside, mixed with the sound of explosions.

Raul turns and shouts to Carlos.

RAUL (CONT'D)

Hurry, Jefe, they have blown the
gate.

The finca groans under the strain of
the assault.

Raul shouts louder, trying to be heard above the din.

RAUL (CONT'D)
 Cars and men are waiting outside.
 This way, quickly!

Suddenly, there is a very loud explosion from above. Dust and chunks of plaster rain down .

Carlos' sons, Alejandro and Miguel, scream, but keep moving at the insistence of the adults.

Raul rushes toward the side door, the family stumbling behind.

Just as the family passes under a a heavy wooden beam--Crash! /it collapses.

The adults are clear, but the beam strikes Alejandro and Miguel. The boys are pinned beneath it.

ISABELLA'S SCREAM IS RAW AND GUTTURAL Raul and Carlos struggle to lift the beam but are unauccessful. The boys expire Isabella is hysterical. Carlos is on his knees infroint of the boys, tears rolling down his face,

Raul grabs Isabella by one arm, and Carlos with his other hand. He pulls them, struggling away. Isabella fights him, trying to breal free.

ISABELLA) (SHRIEKING)
 No! My boys! My babies!

CARLOS (TO HIS WIFE)
 Isabella! We have to go, now!

Raul And Carlos both grab a arm.and Drag her away as the ceiling CREAKSominously, ready to collapse.

RAUL (SCREAMING)
 The whole place is coming down! We must get out. Now! Carlos Takes one last , agonixong look at his dead sons before Raul shoves him forward, dragging Isabella along with him.

Finally, reaching the side door, Raul flings it open. They all stumble through, the noise of combat and destruction echoing around them. As they rush into the night.

I/E. ARMOR-PLATED SUV-NIGHT

A black, armor-plated SUV roars out Raul through a side gate of the finca, its tires throwing durt and dust.

Bullets ping off the exterior as it speeds down a rugged, desert road. The night is full of the sound of gunfire.

INT. SUV-CONTINUOUS

Raul is in the back seat, gripping an automatic rifle. His face is set with determination, sweat beading on his brow. He leans the gun out the window and lets loose at pursuing vehicles.

Across from him, another cartel gunman is at the opposite window, also firing. /in the front passenger seat, a third cartel man, is ready to fire if necessary.

The driver drives fast, erratically, attempting to avoid large holes in the road. He is not always successful. There is still sound of bullets hitting the SUV.

RAUL (TO DRIVER)
Faster hombre, or /i will make you walk!

A helicopter swoops overhead, its spotlight illuminating the SUV. Raul swivels, aiming his rifle up at the chopper. He fires a short burst, and the spotlight goes out. Another burst, and the helicopter is heard flying away.

RAUL /9SHOUTING TO DRIVER)
Faster faster, you, pendejo!Faster!

Isabella, beside Carlos, is visibly distraught. Her face is streaked with tears, as she frantically pounds on Carlos' chest.

ISABELLA (SCREAMING)
It is your fault, Carlos! I told you to get out of this filthy business, but you didn't. Now our beautiful sons are dead because of you.

Carlos' jaw muscles go a mile a minute and his eyes fill with tears.

CARLOS (FRUSTRATED AND ANGRY NOW)
They didn't have to die. The /yanquis could've given you and the boys safe passage or I would have surrendered to keep you all safe. But no! They didn't want that they wanted to be cowboys and get blood. And they did. They killed our sons. The Pinchazos! They will pay.

(MORE)

CARLOS (FRUSTRATED AND ANGRY NOW)
I promise you, Isabella, they will
pay!

RAUL
Jefe, We are almost at the safe
house,. What is our next move?

Carlos grips the headrest in front of him, knuckles white.

CARLOS
I'm thinking of that now, Raul, and
i have an idea.

Raul looks apprehensively at his boss.

RAUL (WARILY)
What is it, Carlos? What are you
thinking?

CARLOS
You know of Pancho Villa?

Raul is surprised.

RAUL
Of course, Carlos, I know of our
great revolutionarey hero. I am not
dtupido.

CARLOS
Of course not Raul. I did not mean
that. Would i have you as my second
if I believed that? No,I would not.

RAUL (CURIOUS)
Then what do you mean, Carlos?
What are you thinking.

Carlos (looks intently at Raul)

CARLOS (CRYPTICALLY)
I am thinking, would it not be
wonderful to use our beloved
national hero to strike back at the
Yanquis for what they have done
today and what they did long ago
to general Villa?

Raul, puzzled, stares apprehensively at Carlos.

RAUL (PUZZLED)
I do not understand, Carlos.

CARLOS (NODDING SAGELY)
Y/ou will my friend as soon as we
are in the hacienda. I must look
something up.

Raul slaps the driver in the back of his head,

RAUL (AGGRAVATED)
Tonto, didn't I te;; you to hurry?
Faster.

The SUV spurts forward as the driver floors the gas.

He spins the wheel and flies down a road barely wider than a cow path. It leads to a gated compound. The driver sticks his arm out the window and gives a signal. He is then waved through a gate by a group of heavily armed guards and pulls around to the rear of a modest hacienda.

After braking to a stop, the doors are opened and everyone bails out and sprints for a rear door on the building.

Int. room in hacienda safe house-day.

The main room is well furnished but not as opulent as the finca. It is dimly lit, with shadows flickering from lanterns on the walls. Carlos and Isabella are seated. Isabella and Carlos are seated on a worn but respectable sofa. Raul is across from them, seated on an easy chair. His weapon is propped against the chair. A carved heavy-wood coffee table is between them.

CARLOS
Let me get something.

He stands, walks across the room to a bookcase and surveys the titles. He finds what he was looking for, and returns, with the book to take his seat. He looks at Raul, holds the book up and shakes it.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
This will answer your questions.

Isabella and Raul watch him closely, curious. The air is thick with tension. Isabella's tear-streaked face is still etched with grief. Carlos flips through the book, obviously looking for something. He apparently finds it, takes glasses from his shirt pocket and puts them on.

He brings the book closer to his face, then tilts the book a bit, to capture some light .and begins to read,

CARLOS VOICE CRACKS AS HE READS)

Psncho Villa... March 9, 1916...
crossed the border with 500 men.
They attacked the town of Columbus,
New Mexico. Eighteen Americans died
in the attack and the Yanquis
retaliated with a failed military
expedition into Mexico.

Carlos slams the book shut with a loud thud that echos through the room and startles both Isabella and Raul. Raul glances uneasily at Carlos.

CARLOS (ANGRY, DETERMINED)

This tells you what I am thinking.
We will follow in the footsteps of
that great man, Pancho Villa. That
path will lead to vengeance for my
boys an protection four our people.

He looks at Isabella and Raul.His Voice is steady but seething with emotion.

CARLOS (CONTINUING) (CONT'D)

The Yanquis have killed my sons.
Disrespected our land, and come
into Mexico like they own it. Like
they tried to frighten Pancho
Villa, they are trying to frighten
me. They could not frighten the
Generaland if thy think they can
frighten me... they are wrong.
Dead wrong.

Raul shifts uneasily, glancing at Isabella, who wipes her eyes, still struggling with what has happened.

ISABELLA (QUIETLY)

Carlos, I don't know if this is the
way...Is taking more lives the
answer?Will This really bting peace
to us? To Mexico?

CARLOS (ADAMANTLY)

First off, my darling, It will be
up to the Yanquis if anyone dies. I
will do my most to make sure that
does not happen. But like Villa, I
will not back down! Our boys are
gone. We can not bring them back.

(MORE)

CARLOS (ADAMANTLY) (CONT'D)

But we can make sure their deaths mean something, and are avenged.

RAUL (POLITELY SKEPTICAL)

But, Jefe, Pancho Villa's raid... the North sent an army after him. They may do the same to us.

Carlos shrugs.

CARLOS

They may Raul, but if they have one bit of humanity left in their evil bodies, they will not risk their citizen's lives

Isabella looks doubtful.

ISABELLA (BITTERLY)

I don't know, Xarlod. They are smakes! Evil serpents. They may not care who dies.

Carlos takesv a deep breath, in preparation of the words he is about tpo utter. We will take hostages that are important to them! Raul, my friend, you will see to that. It all hinges on who we seizr being of great importance to them.

/isabella looks unconvinced.

ISABELLA (DOUBTFULLY) (CONT'D)

But such a small town, will there be anyone of any importance to the Washington "Yanquis?"

Carlos looks on Raul.

CARLOS

I don't know my love, but Raul will see. If not, we may have to change the locatrion of our raid. Although I would hate to do that. The symbolism with Villa will rally our countrrymen, not to mention, Saint Villa watching down and protecting us.

ISABELLA (TEARFULLY)

Carlos, I don't want to lose you, too. I could not bearn it.

Carlos puts an arm around her and pulls her close. His Expression softens for a moment as he strokes her hair.

CARLOS

You won't lose me, mi amor. I am doing this for our boys ...and for Mexico. Besides, The great Pancho Villa will watch over our action.

He pulls away, his eyes hardening again as he looks at Raul.

CARLOS (CONFIDENTLY) (CONT'D)

This will work. I promise you both. Good and justice are on our side. The Yanquis will be gone from Mexico and our country will finally be free of their dominance.

Carlos picks the book up again, from the coffee table. He opens it, and flips to the page about Pancho Villa's raid. He Points to the page.

CARLOS (SOFTLY, TO HIMSELF) (CONT'D)

This time, I swear on my son's spirits,...It will end differently And Proudly for Mexico!

EXT. COLUMBUS, NEW MEXICO—MAIN STREET—DAY

The tranquil town of Columbus, with its small busioness section and qyiet streets, is suddenly interrupted by the rumble of mptorcycles and small trucks.

Raul leads the way on a large Harley, followed by smaller motorbikes and pickup trucks, one of which has a heavy caliber machine gun mounted in the bed. The men are all armed to the teeth, with automatic rifles and handguns.

The locals, on the sidewalks, watch in shock as the convoy roars through town. Guns are fired into the air, to scare the citizens indoors. It works. Noone is hurt.

RAUL (ON THE BIKE, RAISES ONE ARM, YELLING)

Vamonos, cabrones! Scare them off. Don't let anyone get in our way.

His men whoop and holler and fire occasional shots, all the while laughing as they watch the residents scatter for shelter into their homes or businesses.

WOMAN LOOKING OUT SHOP WINDOW (SCREAMING)

Ay Dios mio!

Doors slam shut and window shades are hastily pulled down.

The convoy exits at the far end of the business district, having successfully accomplished its initial mission of terrorizing the town folk. The camera follows as the gunman travel a bit further before pulling into a long driveway. At the end they pull and park haphazardly in front of a two-story brick and mortar building.

EXT. COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL-DAY

Raul jumps off the Harley, his rifle slung over his shoulder. His eyes scoping the front of the building as he heads for it. He turns to his men, barking orders.

RAUL
Vamos! All of you, follow me!

He runs directly for the front double doors, The men following behind like a pack of wolves.

Raul gsters the three closest men to him.

RAUL (CONT'D)
You three, stay with the trucks and watch for any trouble.

As Raul approaches the doors with his men, we see above on the front of the building- Columbus Memorial High School.

As Raul reaches the doors, he doesn't hesitate. He flings the doors open, storms inside, his men pouring in behind him.

INT. COLUMBUS MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL-DAY

The inside of the school is eerily quit, except for the sounds of the men's boots v echoing through the halls. Frightened students per from doorwaya and through windowa, eyes wide with terror. They're too scared to scream. Too scared to even move.

Raul rscs to a straircase and begins to run up it. He turns to his men, waves his arms, and shouts loudly.

RAUL
Quick, Hombres, this way. The auditorium is on the second floor.

Raul runs up to another set of double-doors, his men with him.

Raul throws the doors open, races through, his men following right behind.

INT. COLUMBUS MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL-AUDITORIUM-DAY

The auditorium is filled with students, seated on the rows of chairs, facing the stage. Banners on the walls and stage indicate the ongoing "College Opportunities Presentation." A few teachers are on the stage, with the college representatives, and a couple more, seated in the front row of seats on the floor. The crowd is mostly quiet, except for murmuring. Suddenly, Raul and his men burst in through the doors. They are heavily armed.

Raul raises his automatic rifle and, with a deafening burst of gunfire, shoots into the ceiling. The students are shocked into a stunned silence. That only lasts a short minute as the room erupts in screams. Raul waves his arms frantically, motioning for everyone to get down.

RAUL (YELLING)

Everyone! On the floor! Now!
Move!!

Panic sets in. Teachers move quickly, trying to calm the frantic students, urging them down from their seats and onto the floor in front of the stage, where Raul's men are herding them. Faces are filled with terror, none daring to make a sound.

Raul scans the room, rifle raised, pacing back and forth in front of the stage. His men rifles also raised, are spread out around the room, completely incircling the students and teachers. A few gunmen are stationed at the doors. A female teacher stands and loudly addresses the room.

TEACHER 1(CALM, TRYING TO REASSURE)

Everyone stay calm. Do as they say.

RAUL (BOOMING VOICE)

All your phones! Now in the bags!
Pronto!

Several men disperse within the room, collecting cell phones into open bags.

All that can be heard are phones being tossed into bags, as the entire room sits in trembling silence.

RAUL)LOUDLY)

Sit. Stay quiet. Don't move and no one gets hurt.

Raul motions sharply to a group of his men.

RAUL

Secure the doors. Men immediately head to the multiple doors. And begin wrapping thick chains around the handles, securing the doors tightly. Then they are padlocked.

The ominous clang of the metal securing the exits reverberates in the large room, intensifying the sense of dread.

Raul surveys the auditorium, eyes moving coldly over the frightened faces of students and faculty. Satisfied, he pulls out his phone, and dials.

RAUL (INTO PHONE, LOW AND STEADY) (CONT'D)
It's done, Jefe. Almost 150 students and a few teachers.

CARLOS (V.O. PLEASED)
Good work. You did your research and reconnaissance well. Congratulations, My friend.

RAUL (PLEASED)
Thank you, Jefe, Now?

CARLOS (V.O. DETERMINED)
I will let the /yanquis know that we have their children. /you will have to be vigilant. The Yanquis may make a move to free them. You must make sure they don't succeed until our demands are met.

RAUL
Do not worry, Jefe. The gringos will not succeed if they try something foolish.

CARLOS (V.O.)
I know that my friend. I have great faith in you. You know that. Now it is time to let the invaders know. I will keep you posted. Adios.

Raul ends the call, tucks the phone into his pocket. He turns and surveys the auditorium one more time, as his men stand guard at the chained doors and hold rifles on the captives.

The students huddled together on the floor, their faces pale with fear, remain silent, unsure what will happen next.

INT. HACIENDA SAFE HOUSE-- DAY

In the living room of the hacienda safe house, the camera focuses on Raul's grim expression, the cold calculating eyes. There is a flurry of activity-- technicians scurry about, adjusting cameras, setting up cables, and adjusting sound equipment and lights. Bright studio-type lights flood the room, and are centered on the small stage and podium Carlos will speak from. Carlos stands there now, perusing the papers on the podium in front of him. His expression is determined and calculated, but there is also a spark of passion in his eyes.

Off to the side, Isabella, silent, watches her husband raptly, concern, etched across her face.

A large camera is pointed directly at Carlos, who stands tall, dressed in his usual attire, with the addition of a sport coat. Behind him a large Mexican flag drapes across the wall, not so subtly reinforcing the message he will present.

The cameraman makes some last minute adjustments.

A technician wearing headphones and standing beside the camera starts the countdown. On completing, he gives a signal.

A red light goes on above the camera and Carlos is given a sign to begin. A TV monitor shows Carlos' face being broadcast across the world on multiple networks. He speaks in Spanish, with his words immediately being relayed in English to appropriate outlets.

CARLOS (SPEAKING INTO THE MICROPHONE
AND LOOKING SERIOUSLY INTO THE CAMERA)
People of Mexico. People of the
united States.

9pauses) President Harrison.

Carefully pacing himself for impact, there is a weight to his words.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
Earlier today, my men entered the
town of Columbus, New Mexico-- a
place of historical significance to
my fellow countrymen-- and took
control of 150 students and
teachers. Unlike what the forces
the forces of the north often do,
none of the 150n will be harmed as
long as the U.S.

(MORE)

CARLOS (CONT'D)

government does not try anything foolish, as they are often wont to do. Also the meeting of our demands by your President Harrison is necessary for the hostages safety.

Cut to: Various newsrooms around the world, showing the broadcast, with citizens watching in stunned silence. Carlos continues his speech, his voice growing in intensity. My two young sons were killed in this criminal invasion of my country, as were many of my fellow citizens. My family has paid a very high price because of Washington's endless meddling in other sovereign countries affairs... for your barbaric imperialistic ambitions. But this is not just about my beautiful sons... This is more about the freedom and dignity of the Mexican people safe in their own country from illegal aggression from the north. I am sure the rulers to the north, will have a justification for their latest bloody insanity! Don't they always give some self-serving excuse for their newest rampage? Yes they do. That is why I ask, the people of the world to support Mexico and her people in this time of need. Our friends everywhere who have already felt the evil whip of the Yankis, and also those who realize, that if something is not done to stop this rampaging empire, their families and homelands, will soon suffer the same, or even worse. fate.

The camera moves to Isabella, seated off to the side, it slowly zooms onto her face. The grief is still apparent in her face, but as she glances toward Carlos, we see a mixture of sorrow and pride in her eyes.

Carlos raises his voice, steady but now filled with emotion.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

For over a century, the /united States has treated my beloved Mexico, as nothing more than a backyard, something to exploit when needed and to ignore when not . To show it no respect. Non, I say to you! The world knows this is true for us along with tens of millions of others who have suffered greatly because of the United States evil self-centerdness. //you all know this because you have eyes to see. And ears to hear And brains to think. But we have been brutalized into submission. But no more, I say to you. As of today it ends! No more, I promise. And with the support of the decent people of the world, it will be!

Carlos leans forward, his fists tightening on the podium.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

President Harrison, to you I say,
you now have 48 hours to withdraw
all American troops from Mexican
soil. You will also issue a written
guarantee that there will be no
future interference in Mexico's
internal affairs.

The camera zooms in on Carlos,
, his face very intense and determined.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

/you will also immediately start a
plan to pay reparations and
reimbursements to Mexican citizens
you have harmed today and in the
past history of our country. If
you do not implement these demands
within 48 hours, the fate of the
150 young Americans will be on your
conscience

His last words echo throughout the
room and the world, as we see on
monitors. There is a powerful
silence, and then, Carlos raises a
clenched fist, looks fiercely into
the camera. Then he speaks
forcefully.

Viva Villa!

Viva Mexico!

Venceremos!

The feed cuts out, the monitor goes dark. There is a
spattering of applause, before Carlos shows his displeasure,
and it dies out. Carlos steps away from the podium, the
adrenaline from the emotional presentation still coursing
through him. The technicians and crewmen quickly start
dismantling equipment, Carlos, surveying the scene, seems
almost calm now, as if a weight has been lifted from him.

He turns to look at Isabella, who has watched it all from her
chair off to the side. The pride she feels for her husband
is obvious on her face. She smiles at him reassuringly.

Carlos walks to his wife, takes her hand and kisses her
cheek.

ISABELLA (SOFTLY)

And now we wait for the Yankees to
decide?

Carlos gives her a firm nod, his face determined.

CARLOS (QUIETLY, BUT WITH RESOLVE)
 Yes, my love, but even more
 importantly, we wait for the world
 to choose sides.

INT. OVAL OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

He mood is celebratory. President Harrison sits at the head of the long conference table, surrounded by his Cabinet and top advisors. They're all in high spirits, leaning back in their chairs, exchanging grins, and congratulating one another. Folders with reports, and papers, are scattered across the table, evidence of their "victory"

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (SMIRKING)
 We've taken down almost every major
 lab. Most cartel leaders are either
 dead or in custody. This was a damn
 good day, any way you look at it.

ATTORNEY GENERAL (RAISING A COFFEE
 CUP IN A MOCK TOAST)
 A crippling blow to these criminal
 organizations, for sure. We have
 finally put an end to them.

PRESIDENT (NODDING, RELAXED)
 David had to take an important
 call, but he will join us shortly,
 to take part in the festivities.

The others chuckle and smile smugly, basking in their apparent triumph.

Just Then, the door bursts open, and David Foster hurries in, he appears harried.

The room falls silent. The occupants sense something of importance is about to be revealed.

DAVID FOSTER (URGENTLY)
 I apologize, Mr. President, but the
 TV, may I turn it on? There is
 something on which is pertinent
 and of extreme importance.

The President raises an eyebrow, warily, but motions for David to proceed.

PRESIDENT
 Go ahead, David.

David heads for the TV, grabbing a remote clicker off the table as he does. He points the device at the TV, presses a button, and the screen comes to life. The gathered watch as they see Carlos, mid-broadcast, standing tall in front of the Mexican flag, delivering his ultimatum. The VIP's around the table listened stunned to the English translator repeat Carlos's dialogue. The room of presidential advisors learn that Carlos has seized the 150 hostages in response to the invasion, of the deaths of his two young sons, and of what Carlos has demanded. The jubilation of a minute ago, changes to shock and bewilderment.

PRESIDENT (URGENTLY) (CONT'D)

David, have Rameriz's entire speech fed in here, immediately. We must study it closely.

David hurries from the room.

There is a flicker from the TV and Carlos's speech, has apparently been restarted from its beginning. As Carlos speaks, the president, who now has the remote fast forwards to desired parts.

CARLOS

Again, the United States has invaded a sovereign country. In this case it is, also again, Mexico, innocent citizens have died in this brazen, illegal act, which is nothing new for the Yanquis, as the world knows.

Carlos hesitates, then begins again, his voice cracking.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Including my two young sons, eight and twelve years old, who have perished in this barbaric act.

Gasps go up from the advisors as they exchange shocked and worried glances.

CARLOS (GRAVELY) (CONT'D)

In response to this invasion, I have seized 150 students from the high school in Columbus, New Mexico. None have been hurt at this time. And none will be if the demands I am about to reveal are met.

(MORE)

CARLOS (GRAVELY) (CONT'D)

Students of Mexico's rich history, will realize the irony in the selection of Columbus, which is the site at which ,100 yrs ago, the glorious Mexican revolutionary, Pancho Villa, also made a strike for liberty against the agressor from the north.

The advisors sit stunned, eyes glued to the screen. All the gloating, back-slapping has disappeared in a minute.

Carlos continues now in almost a business-like tone.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

I want to be clear, this is not only about my boys, although this is a crushing blow to my wife and I, but is more importantly about the freedom of the Mexican people to not have to live in fear of these murderous attacks from the north, whenever they feel a need to quench their blood lust! We Will put an end to this, Now! President Harrison, unless you meet these following demands, the fate of these young Americans will be on your hands.

Several of the advisors are pale and seem floored and seem shocked by what they are hearing. They are silent, until the Secretary of Defense slams his fist down on the table, fluttering papers and startling more than one advisor. The Secretary's face is twisted with anger.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (FURIOUS)

This dirty son of a bitch! How did this happen? He will pay. He won't get away with it.

The Director of the C.I.A. Looks around sheepishly.

CIA DIRECTOR APOLOGETICALLY)

We had no idea...no intel on anything like this being possible. Nothing!

Most of the other advisors look sympathetically on the CIA Director, yet the smug expressions on the heads of FI and DEA can't be ignored.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has a smug ,self-satisfied expression, as he addresses the others.

CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF?
(POMPOUSLY)

Of course , if some of our cabinet partners could handle their responsibilities, as the military has , we wouldn't be in this predicament.

CIA A director glares at the general.

CIA DIRECTOR (ANGRILY)
One word for you, general...
Afghanistan!

The general almost comes over the table at the CIA head, His body actually shaking with rage, his face flushed.

The President clears his throat loudly.

PRESIDENT (DEMANDING)
Gentlemen! Enough! I won't have this inter agency bickering! We ate all on the same team here. The question is... Now what?

David Turns in his chair toward the President.

DAVID (CALMLY)
Ramirez just changed the game, Mr. President. This isn't over, as we all had hoped it would now be. We are entering a new phase which will have to be dealt with gingerly and on many levels.

President Harrison lets out a deep sigh and rubs his hand down his face, top to bottom. He Looks at David.

PRESIDENT (TRYING TO REMAIN CALM)
David, i need you in my office. We Need to contain this... now. The rest of you may go. If your input is needed. David will be in touch. And It goes without saying. You all are to remain tight-lipped on all of this. Ms. Rogers will handle any communications with the press or public, as is her duty. Thank you all and enjoy time with your families.

The President stands, watching the cabinet and advisors follow suit and troop out the door.

INT. . COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL-AUDITORIUM-NIHHT

The 250 students sit, leaning close together, their expressions full of fear. The auditorium is warm and the students are sweating, uncomfortable. Armed cartel members are stationed around the perimeter of the large hall, brandishing their weapons as their eyes scan the students.

Raul, Carlos' right-hand man, stands near the main entrance, scanning the students closely. The tension and fear level are high. No student dares move.

In the far corner of the hall we see three students-- Tina, Lucas, and Brandon whisper to each other. Tina, an intelligent looking co-ed, glances over at Raul, then turns back to her classmates.

TINA (WHISPERING)

We have to do something. We can't just sit here. They could kill us or we could be shot in a crossfire, if there is an attack here to free us.

LUCAS (WHISPERING, VOICE CRACKING)

They'll kill us for sure if we do something stupid. We all know what these cartel criminals are capable of.

Tina looks at Lucas with determination in her eyes.

TINA (WHISPERING)

We can't just sit here and die doing nothing. But what?

Brandon, an obvious nerd, holds up his phone, the screen dimmed.

BRANDON (WHISPERING)

Look what they didn't find.

Lucas knocks Brandon's hand down.

LUCAS (WHISPERING VOICE SHAKING)

Put that away, dork. You want your head blown off?

TINA (WHISPERING)

Brandon, carefully see if you can send anything out. Make sure ringer is off.

Lucas clenches his body, as Brandon carefully removes the phone from his pocket and lowers his face to the screen. He presses buttons.

BRANDON 9 QUIETLY, FRUSTRATED)
They've jammed signals. No cells,
no internet.

Tina curses under her breath, glancing discreetly at the guards. They seem anxious, pacing about and raking the room with their eyes.

TINA) (QUIETLY)
We have to get outside to either
make a call or a run for it. We
can't do snything here.

Lucas hesitates, then slowly reahes into his pocket and pulls out a small Swiss Army knife.

Tina looks surprised

TINA) (CONT'D)
What are you guys going to pull out
next, a machine gun? You're luvky
you are both alive. Crazy! But
good job.

LUCAS (SOFTLY, VOICE TREMBLING)

Maybe, we could try to pry a door in the gym. That's in the old section of the school They might not be too secure there. It might work.

Tina is excited but before she can respond, a shadow looms over them. Raul!

He towers over the three students, his cold eyes locking onto the knife in Lucas' hand. The students recoil in fear, as Raul's lips curl into a cruel smile. His voice is soft but full of menace.

RAUL OMINOUSLY)
What do we have here?

Lucas drops the knife, his hands trembling, but Raul moves with chilling speed, snatching it from the floor. He inspects i, turning the blade over in his hand, before shifting his gaze to Lucas. He snickers and then speaks.

RAUL
So, you want to be a hero, huh?

His voice is casual, almost amused, but the slit of his eyes, is unmistakable. He steps closer to Lucas, who is breathing shallowly with sweat on his brows. Tina clenches her fist, face pale.

RAUL (CONT'D)

You think this...toy is going to help you escape?

Raul suddenly opens the blade, moving it against Lucas' throat.

Lucas' eyes pop to the size of checkers. Tina and Brandon gasp. Many other students are now watching the scene in horror, unsure whether to look away or keep watching as the terror unfolds.

Raul (loudly to the entire assembly)

Not only is this these three's last warning... take this as a last warning to all of you.

This is what happens when you think you can outsmart us.

When you try something stupido!

Raul pushes the blade enough for Lucas to flinch, but not enough to draw blood. Shivers run through Lucas' entire body.

Tina is watching all this with extreme alarm on her face.

RAUL TO TINA)

What is the matter? Do you think I should make an example of him? Just to show you all what happens if you try something loco?

TINA

No, please! He was just scared. We all are. He Won't do anything else, we all promise.

Lucas, Brandon, and Tina nod vigourasly.

Raul smiles wickedly, slowly lowering the knife from Lucas' throat and steps back.

RAUL (MOCKINGLY)

You are all scared? Well, you should be!

Raul tosses the knife to the ground in front of Lucas. Who lets out a shaky breath, his knees buckling a bit.

RAUL (LOUDLY, TO THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLY) (CONT'D)
All of you! Take this as a
warning to all of you..... not
just to these three. Anyone Tries
anything ,they will get this, only
ten times worth.

Raul, in a flash, slams the stock of his rifle into Lucas' mouth. The blood gushes instantly, with Lucas spitting out blood and teeth. Lucas falls to his knees. Tina and Brandon crouch beside him, trying to give comfort, their faces pale. A rumble of shock rolls through the auditorium.

Tina's face burns with anger and a rumble of shock goes through the auditorium.

TINA (QUIET, BUT FORCEFUL)
He will regret that, the animal!

Brandon places his hand on her arm, trying to prevent her from a foolish action.

Raul wipes blood from the stock of his rifle and heads back toward the main door. The cartel gunmen exchange glances, a few even smirking at Raul's display of violence. He is comfortably ensconced with his admiring subordinates. They all gaze at him with new respect, and a touch of fear.

INT. OVAL OFFICE-DAY

Three

The mood is tense but controlled as President Harrison sits behind the Resolute desk, his hands folded, deep in thought. David Foster on a chair in front of the desk, Glances anxiously at the clock on the wall.

DAVID
The call should come through any
minute, sir.

PRESIDENT (SIGHS, LEANING BACK)
None too soon, either. Three nights we've been wrestling over this. Are you still confident it will work?

DAVID (NODDING CALMLY)
Yes, sir, I am. Again. Justice has assured me it is within your powers as Commander-in-Chief to issue this offer as an Executive Action, given the direct threat fentanyl is to American citizens lives. And the pardons. Your pardon powers are unquestioned.

President Harrison listens intently, rubbing his temples.

PRESIDENT
I'm still worried how the American people will look at this. It's a very fine line we're walking. Buying drugs from the cartels! It's going to sound crazy to the people but...if it saves lives.

DAVID
The American people will understand, Mr. President, I am sure of that. You have attempted everything to stamp out this scourge. No one could have foreseen that Rimerez would respond as he has. I firmly believe that people will be glad to be done with this poison once and for all, no matter the unorthodox methods used to end it. Not to mention the tens of thousands of lives, we will make sure to inform them of, that this action will save. I am sure, after the initial surprise, and with the correct presentation of the benefits of this endeavor, the nation will be in full support of this, Mr. President.

The President is thoughtful.

PRESIDENT
I wish I could be as convinced as you are, David. I hope you are right.

Just then the phone on the desk buzzes and a red light flashes.

DAVID
This is it, Sir.

David picks up the handset, places it to his ear, presses the flashing light button and listens, before speaking into the phone.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Yes, Mr. Ramirez, I am the President's Chief of Staff. I am giving the phone to President Harrison now.

David hands the phone to the President, who clears his throat and then begins speaking.

PRESIDENT
Mr. Ramirez, this is President Harrison. I am glad you agreed to this chat.

We hear Carlos, on the other end of the line, articulate and respectful, in V. O. As the conversation commences.

CARLOS (V.O.)
Mr. President... three days and I have yet to see any withdrawal of your troops from Mexican soil! I agreed to this call as a courtesy, but with no action on my demands, why should I continue this call?

PRESIDENT
Because I have an offer that benefits us both.

CARLOS
Go on, Mr. President. I am listening.

PRESIDENT
Mr. Ramirez. Because I am told that it is politically impossible for me to acquiesce to your demands, especially with no resolution to the fentanyl issue, I have a counter proposal... If you release all of the hostages unharmed, I am prepared to authorize the purchase, by the U. S.

(MORE)

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Government, of all fentanyl and fentanyl-containing products that your organization either produces, or distributes, for the American market. The purchases will be on your side of the border, so you will no longer have to worry about the smuggling phase of your operation and the violence and law enforcement obstacles that entails. We are prepared to offer an agreed upon price, equal to what you would receive on our side of the border,

For your product.

A long silence hangs in the air before Carlos speaks again.

CARLOS SUSPICIOUS, BUT
INTRIGUED)(V.O.)

You want to buy my product?!

PRESIDENT

Yes! Everything. All of it!

Carlos chuckles in his belief, still in V. O.

CARLOS (V. O.)

This is unexpected, Mr. President. Let me understand this... You are offering to buy my drugs? A contract to sell drugs to the /united States Government? To sweeten the pot, we will agree to you acting as broker for other cartels. You would be able to funnel their fentanyl and fentanyl products to us at the same price. I am sure you would be able to put a premium on those transactions for yourself.

CARLOS V. O,)

All the drugs?

PRESIDENT

Not just any drugs. . Fentanyl! And before it reaches our children. We buy it . We destroy it. No one is hurt, you are paid the same as if you sold it here to your regular distributors.

(MORE)

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

And before you ask ,Mr. Ramirez,
no, you and your people will have
no legal repercussions for these
transactions. As a matter of fact,
if you accept this offer /i can
offer a pardon to you and all
members of your organizatrion for
all all past U. S. Federal crimes
up to, and including these
transactions we are speaking of.

Carlos is quiet. Probably stunned, processing the offer.

CARLOS (V. O.) (WITH INTEREST)

This will be a monumental
agreement. No more interference
from your government? Same price
we always recieve? Full pardons?

My lawyers will have to go over this with a magnifying glass!

PRESIDENT

Of course! I understand that. My
Chief of Staff will bring our legal
representatives, along with
paperwork, to Mexico to meet with
your legal team to get this all in
a legal, achievable form.

The call is ended and the President looks at David, both men
are smiling.

PRESIDENT

Well David, what do you think?

David appears hopeful.

DAVID

I think that you have taken a bold
step, Sir, that will result in the
saving of thousands of American
lives.

The President smiles slightly but still seems a bit hesitant.

PRESIDENT

Let us hope so, David. We shall
see.

INT. DAVID AND SUSAN'S TOWNHOUSE-LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

The lights are dim, giving the cozy Georgetown townhouse an intimate, comfortable atmosphere, Susan, David's wife, sits at one end of an expensive-looking couch, her arms crossed protectively, worry etched deeply into her face, A cup of tea sits untouched on the coffee table, steam curli

ng into the air.

David stands by the window, looking out at the street. His posture is tense, hands in his pockets

INT. MEXICAN BORDER-NIGHT.

A convoy of black SUV's pulls off the narrow, dusty road into the shadows of an abandoned warehouse on the Mexican side of the border. Dust rises from the tires, swirling around the middle car, containing Justice Department lawyers and David Foster, all tense and silent. He turns toward Susan, His expression conflicted but resolute.

DAVID

I have to go, Susan. It's not a choice at this point. This is the job I've accepted and this trip is part of that job., I have promised the Preaident... not to mention, the many lives my prescense may save.

Susan inhales deeply, her voice soft and trembling.

SUSAN

You've already given so much of yourself for this job, David. You don't owe your life!

DAVID

I must do this, darling.It Is my duty.

She rises and crosses the room to him, her eyes searching his. She gently grasps his hand.

SUSAN PLEADING)

But going into cartel territory, negotiating with a man like Carlos. Rameriz ... it's too dangerous. What if something happens?

David puts on a false look of confidence.

DAVID

Ramirez has promised no harm will
come to ud.

Susan guffaws.

SUSAN

Don't make me laugh. This is a
man, you have told. Is flooding our
country with yjay fentanyl poison.
And you are naive enough to
believe he wouldn't fib to you!

DAVID (SIGHS)

Susan, I know the risks. Believe me,
I do. But it's my obligation. I am
duty bound. This is what I agreed
to when the President and I began
this project. And if I can be of
help in freeing the hostages and
stop that poison from entering our
country, I have to do it!

Susan pulls away, pacing back towards the couch, her hands
wringing together anxiously.

SUSAN (TEARY-EYED)

But what about us, David? What if
you don't come back? Or are hurt?
What then?

David walks to the couch and sits beside her. He gently takes
her by the shoulders, turns her to face him. He looks deeply
into her eyes, his voice low and tender, but very serious.

DAVID

I will be careful. We will have
protection coming with us... and I
will be back. I promise you that!

He pauses, his voice cracking slightly,

DAVID (CONT'D)

Susan, I can't not do this, knowing
I could contribute to the success
of this trip to free the hostages
and all the kids-- our kids--that
are being poisoned, dying because
of what men like Ramirez are
bringing into our country.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

If going to Mexico means i can help
save lives... i have to try. What
kind of a man would i be if I
didn't?

Susan's eyes fill with tears. She places her hands on his
face, her thumbs gently brushing his face.

SUSAN

It's just that I'm scared, David. I
Don't want to lose you.

David closes his eyes for a moment ,his expression serious.
His voice matches it

DAVID

I am scared too, but we will get
through this... and soon i will be
back with exciting stories to tell
you.

Susan looks away, blinking back tears, before

SUSAN

I hate when you are right, David!

She leans her forehead against his chest, and David wraps his
arms around her, holding her close. There's a long moment of
silence between them, both of them not moving, as if trying
to capture every second before he leaves.

SUSAN (WHISPERING) (CONT'D)

Just...come back to me. That's all
I ask.

David kisses the top of her head, then tilts her chin up so
their eyes meet.

DAVID

I will. I promise.

They share a quiet intimate kiss. They look peaceful,
unworried for a long moment. David pulls slightly away. His
voice soft and full of love.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I'll be back before you know it.
And... when I am ...this will all
be behind us. And we will have
some fun!

They both chuckle lewdly, humorously.
/i'll bere. I can't wait.

SUSAN(KIDDINGLY)

EXT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE-NIGHT

The SUV's stop close to the warehouse. David is the first to step out, his eyes scanning the surroundings as his hand instinctively touches the grip of the 9mm holstered under his jacket. Behind him, the two Justice Department lawyers, dressed in suits and visibly uncomfortable, follow closely behind.

On all sides of them, armed cartel members, appear from the shadows, rifles in hand.

They are very dangerous looking, their fingers on the triggers. It's apparent they have orders to kill if anything goes wrong.

One of them, Elio, steps forward, nodding at David. He's thin, with a scar running down his cheek.

ELIO (IN ACCENTED ENGLISH)
Senior Foster. This way, please.

David gives a quick nod, glances at the lawyers, who, behind him, are visibly sweating, and not only because of the sultry Mexican night. They swallow hard, the fear evident on their faces. David says nothing as he, along with the lawyers, follows Elio toward a side door on the warehouse, the cartel gunmen following them like a pack of wolves.

INT. WAREHOUSE- NIGHT

Inside, the warehouse is cold and massive. Rows of long, tube florescent lights hang from the ceiling. They illuminate the interior well, but are unpleasant to the eyes. In the middle of the room, seated around a long, wooden table, Carlos' lawyers wait-- three men in expensive suits, their expressions cold and unreadable.

David steps closer, facing them. Behind him, the Justice Department lawyers are visibly nervous, sweating and clutching their briefcases as if they were shields.

The middle of the three men at the table, obviously in charge, addresses David. He sounds calm and confident.

ATTY. JUAN HERRO

Senor Foster, I am Attorney Juan Herro. Shall we begin?

DAVID

Yes, let's get this done.

David nods, walks to the table and sits opposite Juan Herro. The Justice lawyers step up to the table, place their briefcases there and remove papers, placing them on the table. The Mexican lawyers each already have a small pile of papers in front of them.

David glances at the sweating Justice lawyers, the tension is heavy. There's no guarantee that Carlos won't resort to trickery. For all the Americans know this is an ambush and they will shortly all be killed. But David's expression hardens. He is here to save 150 lives. We can see, that he knows he must keep his uneasiness in check and buck up his lawyers.

Juan Herro nods. One of the other cartel lawyers, picks up the Justice Department papers, scanning them. Behind him, cartel gunmen remain vigilant, cradling their weapons.

David's eyes move to a far corner of the room, where a satellite phone rests on a table.

Suddenly, a side door opens and Elio steps back in. He gives David a cold smile and nods toward the phone.

ELIO

It is time, Senor Foster. He is waiting to speak to you.

On his way to the phone, David speaks to the head Justice Department lawyer.

DAVID

Is everything acceptable?

The lawyer nods nonchalantly.

LAWYER

Yes, everything is fine.

David continues to the table, picks up the phone, holding it to his ear. Carlos' voice crackles through, calm, with an edge of authority.

CARLOS (V.O.)
Mr. Foster, /i assume you are are
confident all is in order?

David glances back at the Justice lawyes giving a last
perusal of the papers. The head lawyer, again, gives David a
nod of approval.

David speaks into the phone, His voice is steady.

DAVID
Yes, Everything is acceptable. And
to you?

CARLOS (V.O.)
Yes, my legal representative has
given it the green light! We have
deal, Mr. Foster. Si?

David confident, almost happy,

DAVID
Yes, we do. And I am confident that
all will turn out benferficial to
both of our sides. I will leave our
lawyers here until they, along with
yours are able to erase any
wrinkles in the documents. Thank
you and we are always available if
you would like to discuss anythinf.

CARLOS (V.O.)
Bueno, Mr. Foster. Elio will see
you back to your plane safely and
have an enjoyable flight.

DAVID (UPBEAT)
Yes, and have a good rest of your
night. Adios.

DAVID ENDS THE CALL, returns to the table and retakes his
seat.

EXT. COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL-NIGHT

The darkened Columbus High School is lit by the flashing blue
and red lights of police cars, ambulances and media vehicles.
The parking lot is full of FBI agents, wearing identifying
jsckets, local police , and a horde of anxious parents. The
parents have not been able to get any closer than police
barricades since the drama began.

The area is a hub of activity, the parents barely containing themselves.

The large double doors of the building slowly swing open. A few tense moments pass, and then a long line of students, tired, disheveled, cautiously file out the door. For a long moment, there's a stunned silence from the crowd of onlookers.

There is a loud cheer from the parents and then they spot their individual children.

EXT. COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

There's an explosion of emotion as parents run around the police barricades, running toward the students.

PARENTS (SCREAMING)

There they are. Oh my God, there they are!

Mothers and fathers sprint across the pavement, their arms outstretched, desperate to hug their children, relief sweeping over them. Students fall into their parent's arms, sobbing uncontrollably. The crowd is a sea of tears, hugs, and frantic reassurances that families are truly reunited. Parents scrutinize their children, making sure they are uninjured.

PARENTSCRYING)

It'd okay, You're safe now. You're safe

STUDENT (THROUGH TEARS)

Mom, I thought I'd never see you again!

EXT. COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL- ENTRANCE- NIGHT- CONTINUOUS

The cartel gunman stand off to one side where they are being interrogated by armed FBI agents. Their weapons have been taken from them. Raul is closer to the door, with an FBI supervisor. Raul watches the chaotic scene, his face cold, unmoved. As a few trailing students nervously look outside, Raul signals them to exit.

Lucas, the student, caught with the cell phone, steps out of the doorway, his face still covered in bloody bandaging, from Raul's earlier blow with the gun. He Stumbles, weak from the injury, toward a waiting ambulance.

Lucas' father rushes through the crowd, almost knocking over two police officers in his desperation to get to his son.

EXT. REAR OF AMBULANCE-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

LUCAS' FATHER

Lucas! Lucas!

He pulls Lucas into his arms, holding him tight, putting a hand on the bandages.

LUCAS (WEAKLY)

Dad...I'm okay... I'm okay... It's not that bad.

But it is that bad. The father gingerly pulls the bandage aside. Lucas' face is a swollen bloody mess. Paramedics rush him into the back of an ambulance.

PARAMEDIC (TO LUCAS' FATHER)

We will get him to the hospital right now. He will need stitches, at least.

Just then, Lucas's mother races up to the ambulance and demands to accompany her son. She is assisted. Overwrought, into the ambulance with her son.

EXT. COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL-MAIN DOOR-NIGHT- CONTINUOUS.

Meanwhile, Raul watches the scene play out with no sign of emotion.

David steps forward, locking eyes with Raul. There is a brief, intense silence between them.

DAVID (MATTER-OF-FACTLY, BUT FIRM)

You kept your word.

Raul shrugs dismissively.

RAUL

It was not I. I am just following orders. It was my Jefe who gave and kept his word. But you should not be surprised, Mr, Foster, He is a great man, who would always keep his word.

David looks non-committal, but Raul looks anxious.

RAUL (CONT'D)

We are not done yet. Now we will see if your President keeps his word.

DAVID (FIRMLY, CONFIDENT)

You have no worry there. President Harrison is a man of great honor. Everything he agreed to will be carried out. Have no fear there.

Raul

I hope so amigo, I hope so.

With that Raul and his men are escorted away for interrogation by federal men. David follows along.

An agent speaks to David.

AGENT

They're all accounted for and except for boy with head wound, they are all ok. Hospital has told us , he will be fine too.

DAVID

Thank god.

INT. OVAL OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

The mood in the oval office is tense, a mixture of relief and unresolved tension hanging in the air. President Harrison sits at the head of the table, surrounded by his cabinet members, including the Secretary of Defense, the Press Secretary, the heads of the alphabet agencies, along with all the other advisors, and David Foster. The room is brightly lit, with papers strewn along the length of the long conference table.

Avid stands beside the President, at the head of the table. He is briefing the group on the latest developments.

DAVID (PLEASED)

As you all now, by the media reports, all the hostages have been released and, I am happy to add, all except one, are unharmed. Even he, is to be released from the hospital soon.

There is a collective sigh of release, along with a scattering of self-congratulatory applause.

The Secretary of Defense leans forward, clears his throat.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (ANGRILY)
 So what's next? We let Ramirez and
 his men just walk away, just like
 that?

PRESIDENT (TIRED)
 They have my word and a signed
 agreement., Mr. Secretary. And we
 are going to honor that.

The room falls into silence, the advisors contemplating what that actually means, now that the President says the must follow through on the agreement.

The President leans back in his chair, rubbing his temples.

PRESIDENT (EXHALING) (CONT'D)
 Now comes the heavy lifting...
 telling the American people they
 are buying all the cartel fentanyl.
 And how will they react to that?

A few cabinet member shift uncomfortably in their chairs. The Press Secretary speaks up,

PRESS SECRETARY ROGERS (CONFIDENT)
 Mr. President, platform and timing
 are everything. An address to the
 American people would be best
 vehicle to inform them. And that,
 and this is very crucial, first of
 all all the hostages are free, safe
 and sound. We lead with that. /it's
 a huge win-- 150 American kids home
 safe with their families. What a
 joyous outcome! then secondly,
 again important, the information
 about the government procuring all
 future amounts of the drug destined
 for the USA. The relief at the
 kid's safety will overshadow any
 backlash over the fentanyl
 acquisitions.

Here's a murmur of agreement in the room, but the doubts of the hard-liners are displayed in the expressions on their faces.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (SHARPLY)
 Or we arrest Ramirez at he
 exchange, seize his damn drugs, and
 lock him up for life!
 (MORE)

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (SHARPLY)

Let the American people see real justice being served. We'ss show them we make no deals with murderers. The people will eat it up! Mr. President, Revenge is sweet!

A few of the advisors nod in agreement, but David is quick to respond, his voice calm but firm.

DAVID

No. That's not an option. The president has given his word, and signed the agreement. We are legally bound to carry it out. To not do so, would have terrible international repercussions at a crucial time in world events. The reliability of the United States would be shaken to its core, if we went back on the agreement. Also the cartels might retaliate. In more than one way, the consequences could be very damaging to U. S interests and our position, throughout the world. This could be catastrophic at this volatile time in world affairs.

David looks directly at the President, who nods in silent agreement.

PRESIDENT (FLATLY, TO THE ROOM)

We're not breaking the deal. Put aside, that I gave my word, which is perceived as the word of the United States, We have only succeeded in one of our two objectives... the hostages are free. Yes! And that is wonderful and to be celebrated. But our other objective, and maybe even more important than the freeing of the hostages, is stopping the importation of this deadly poison, fentanyl, from entering into our country to kill our young people. If I break my word, what is to stop the cartels from flooding our nation with fentanyl? I will not allow that to happen. We are sticking to the agreement. Anyone who is not on board with this...

(MORE)

PRESIDENT (FLATLY, TO THE ROOM)
 leave now and get your resignation
 papers to David as quickly as
 possible.

The room grows quiet as the weight of the President's words
 sets in. The President's resolve is clear, but the
 uncertainty lingers among some.

PRESS SECRETARY ROGERS (TO PRESIDENT)
 The key is framing it correctly. We
 focus, at first, on the hostage
 lives saved, and the many lives
 that will be saved by taking
 fentanyl off the streets. We make
 it about the kids... No one can
 argue with that.

(CONT'D)

DAVID (NODDING)
 Yes, the people will understand if
 we are clear about the stakes...
 which are... The lives of their
 children... their gand children.

The Secretary of defense looks at the Prsident, still
 unconvinced.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
 And if the people don't buy it. If
 we did too good a "War on Drugs"
 brainwashing job? If this blows up
 in our faces?

The President pauses, his eyes heavy, but his face is still
 determined.

PRESIDENT (QUIETLY)
 The I'll face it. I will take the
 heat. But this is my decision! It
 is final!

The room falls into silence. The President's decision has
 been made,

PRESIDENT (TO DAVID AND PRESS
 SECRETARY) (CONT'D)
 Prepare the statement. Make it
 short and sweet. Lead with the
 release and return of the hostages.
 (MORE)

PRESIDENT (TO DAVID AND PRESS

And include everything--about the deal, , the negatives, if any, and all the benefits to this unique action. I'll let the people see howw important it is for all of them and their families.

David nods, and the Press Secretary is writing furiously in a notebook. All three of their faces show the importance they place on this forthcoming speech.

INT. OVAL OFFICE- NIGHT

President Harrison sits behind his iconic desk in the Oval Office. His face tired with strss lines, Still, his expression is calm, resolute.

Again the room is prepared for a nationwide TV broadcast-- Bright lights, TV camera ained at the President, cables criss crossing the floor with technicians and observers scattered about. Technicians are making their final adjustments. The air is tense but expectant.

In the corner of the room, observing quietly are David Foster, the Press Secretary, and the First Lady, Margaret Harrison.

Cameraman begins finger countdown, holding his hand high.

MAIN CAMERAMAN

We're live in
four...three...two...one...

The red light on top of camera turns on.

PRESIDENT (intently, into camera)
My fellow Americans, tonight, I
speak to you speak to you with
joyous news of great relief-- and
also of a decision that I have made
that may, at first, seem
unconventional, but one i believeis
of immense benefit to our country
and people...pause...

His voice softens, acknowledging the weight of this news.

PRESIDENT (CONTINUING)
 First, Although I am sure you already have heard through the media, I am proud to confirm, that after after tense and difficult negotiations. All of the Columbus, New Mexico hostages are home safe , with their families.

PRESIDENT (EMPATHIZING, SPEAKING NOW DIRECTLY TO THE FAMILIES. (CONT'D)
 To the parents, the loved ones, and the friends of the released hostages-- tonight I share your relief, your joy, your overwhelming gratitude relief, and your overwhelming gratitude that this nightmare has ended, and as it did.

There's a brief pause. The camera tightens on his face as he prepares to pivot.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
 But I join you tonight not only to celebrate this wonderful outcome, I must also share the details of an unconventional agreement I have initiated-- one that will be difficult to explain, and for some it may be hard to accept. But it is a plan that I firmly believe will save more young America lives than were even saved in Columbus, and many times over!... And this is no exaggeration. The number of our young people that will be saved from an early death is actually astronomical.

The President leans into the camera, his expression turns very serious.

PRESIDENT (GRAVELY (CONT'D)
 We have entered into an agreement with the Ramirez Cartel to purchase all of their fentanyl, and fentanyl products, that would be otherwise bound for the United States.

There are scattered gasps from the onlookers.

The President holds up one hand for a moment and gives a reassuring nod. There is silence in the Oval Office again.

PRESIDENT (CONTINUES) (CONT'D)

It's a bitter pill to swallow, and and I understand how repugnant parts of this deal may be to many of you... believe me, it is to me as well. But then these killer drugs will be destroyed before they are able to invade our streets, our schools, and poison and kill our children. This will be a victory of momentous proportions. I know this may appear extreme... and all unique undertakings do appear this way, at first, until they succeed and the benefits are recognized, as I am sure these will be with this, , and very soon. And yes, it comes at a cost--a financial cost, and an even greater moral one. In addition to this, I have also offered cartel members full pardons for any past, and only past federal crimes, up to and including anything they undertake to carry out their end of the agreement.

A beat and pause, as his voice hardens as he continues.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

But I ask you-- what price would you pay to save the lives of your children? To avoid another family having to bury a son or daughter because of this deadly drug? By purchasing this deadly poison before it ever reaches American soil, we can stop the deaths. We can save lives . Thousands of young lives!

His voice turns somber.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

The alternative--raids arrests, violence, "the "War on Drugs" it's a path we've been on for years, and it has not stemmed the tide... quite the opposite... the problem and its consequences have grown to monstrous proportions. This agreement, while unorthodox, takes the power out of the criminals, and cuts off their life blood-- the drug.

(MORE)

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

And for the first time, we will
have control of the drug spigot.../
and we must use it to turn off the
flow of this killer!

The camera zooms out slightly, as he sits back, his
expression softer now.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

I believe any downside to this pact
is a small price to pay for the
immense benefit it will bring. So,
I stand by my decision because I
believe it will save lives- lives
that otherwise might be lost to
this deadly epidemix.

President nods slightly and changes to a tone signalling the
end of his address.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Thank you, and may god bless you
all, and may God continue to bless
the united States of America.

The red camera light flicks off. It is over.

The room is still for a moment, the gravity of what they have
just heard , which was weighing on all those presen, begins
to lift.

The Press Secretary is the first to break the silence, as she
walks to the President's side.

PRESS SECRETARY ROGERS

Mr. President, that was powerful
and very nspiring. I'm sure the
American people will understand
your action now. They'll see it for
what it is-- a solution, not a
compromise.

David steps forward, nodding in agreement.

DAVID

The people needed to hear your
explanation and your assurances,
and they did. I am sure you helped
them to see that thgis will save
thousands of lives. They will
support you, I am sure.

The President turns to look at them both.

PRESIDENT

Thank you both for your assistance
and encouragement. I don't believe
/i could have done it without
either of you. Now, go home to
your families, enjoy them and rest.
/you both deserve it.

The President's gaze falls on his wife, who has stepped forward to join them. She places a hand on her shoulder.

She smiles, proudly, her expression admiring of her husband.

INT. WHITE HOUSE-PRIVATE BEDROOM-NIGHT

The room is dimly lit, just a soft glow from a bedside lamp. Casting long shadows across the richly adorned room. President Edward Harrison sits on the edge of the bed, removing his formal tie. His shoulders sag, the weight of the day showing in his posture and on his face. A light knock sounds on the door, and Margaret Harrison steps in, She exhibits a warm, hesitant smile. She is wearing a long bath robe.

FIRST LADY

I listened closely to every word
you said today, Edward,...It was
wonderful. I couldn't be prouder
of you, darling.

Edward looks at hiswife. He is still very tired but obviously pleased.

PRESIDENT

I am still worried of how the
nation has taken it. We will know
by morning.

The first lady walks to him and sits on the bed beside him. She takes his hand.

FIRST LADY

There is no worry on that Edward,
i/ was listening to the networks
and CNN. They are all enthusiastic
about your address and the focus
groups were all extremely positive.

Edward lets out a sigh of relief.

PRESIDENT

That's assuring. I was concerned about that, but it had to be done, for the American people and for...

He trails off and he glances at his wife, who returns her gaze. Their thoughts are clearly on their daughters now.

Margaret squeezes his hand, looking at him lovingly.

MARGARET (SINCERELY)

I know, Edward, for our girls, for Julie and Jill, our babies. I believe you've given their loss meaning now. It doesn't feel senseless now. The ending of this drug scourge will forever be a tribute to them. They are part of something that will save so many lives.

Edward sighs, a mixture of relief and exhaustion,

He reaches for a rock glass of bourbon on the nightstand, raises it to his mouth and takes a small sip, before setting it down.

Edward hesitates for a moment, but then speaks to his wife.

PRESIDENT

Can I get you something. Margaret?

For a moment she hesitates, We see the old temptation run through her, then, she shakes her head gently.

MARGARET

No, Edward, I don't believe I do. I am done.

Edward looks surprised but pleased.

PRESIDENT

I'm so glad, Margaret. I've missed you. I've missed us. The way it was. I want that back. I need that back.

MARGARET (LOVINGLY)

Me too, dear, this has been so hard on both of us. But I feel like I can breathe again, without dreading every new day. You've done something incredible.

(MORE)

MARGARET (LOVINGLY) (CONT'D)

You've shown the world what an extraordinary leader you are. And you've you have us how to go on in life with hope and a beautiful memory.

The two sit there on the edge of the bed , holding the others hand, together in peaceful silence for a beat. The weight of their shared loss and their journey along the road to healing, hangs in the air. Edward lifts her hand to his lips, kisses it lightly.

PRESIDENT

/i got so lost in my job, Margaret. I neglected our relationship and because of my neglect, lost it for a bit. I see that now. I will never let it happen again. I promise you that, Margaret.

Margaret is gazing at her husband, admiringly. She leans closer, resting her head on his shoulder, and they sit quietly for a minute.

MARGARET (CONFIDENT)

I think we're going to be alright now, Edward.
PRESIDENT (positively)
I know it, Margaret. I know it!

Edward kisses the top of her head, a quiet reassurance. Then they embrace, not in passion, but in mutual understanding, a chaste and gentle intimacy that speaks volumes of their healing.

As they sit there, holding each other close, the outside world-- its demands, crises, and the immense responsibilities-- fades away. They have each other again, and for now, that is all they need.

INT. MEXICAN HACIENDA-NIGHT

The grand Mexican hacienda is buzzing with activity. Ornate chandeliers cast a golden glow over the room, a blend of old-world elegance and modern opulence. At the center, behind a podium, stands Carlos Ramirez dressed impeccably in sportcoat and tie, His chest is puffed out with triumph. A camera crew is setting up in front of him, preparing to record his talk to be broadcast thst evening, exclusively to the Mexican nation. The crowd is celebratory.

In the background, Carlos' wife, Isabella, watches silently. They glance at each other, with looks that convey that the tension that once was strong between them has now faded. Isabella looks supportive but mildly somber.

Carlos drags a comb through his thick, black hair, takes a final look at the papers on the podium in front of him, then clears his throat. His face is determined but calm. He motions to the crew, signalling that he is ready. The cameraman points his index finger forcefully toward Carlos and the red light on top of the camera flicks on. Carlos speaks into the microphone in front of him.

CARLOS (STRONG & STEADY)

My fellow citizens of Mexico, By now, you have most likely heard, today is a day of great victory. Not just for me, my people, and my family, but for all Mexicans. For centuries, our people have been exploited by the /yanquis, but today... today, we have shown them that those days are over. Mexico is strong! Mexico is proud again!

He pauses hoping the words will sink sink in.

CARLOS (FIRM, CONFIDENT) CONTINUES (CONT'D)

The Americans came here thinking they could dictate terms. And why wouldn't they? This has been their way for so long now. And often, we have foolishly let them succeed with this treacherous method. Again, they thought they could invade, humiliate, and control us to their evil wishes, as they have done so often in the past. But instead, they have left our land defeated, with no choice but to negotiate with us as equals.

His tone becomes more impassioned, a fire burning in his eyes.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Just like the great Pancho Villa,

Just like Emiliano Zapata, we stood our ground. And we won! They may have their dollars, their power, their armies.... But we have our pride, our courage. We have our pride. We have our spirit. We have our people. We have our Mexico!

The room is quiet, the assembled hanging on every word. Carlos stare even more intently directly into the camera. His voice firm and convincing.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

And now, I announce the birth of the Ramirez Foundation, in the names and memories of my beloved sons, Miguel and Alejandro, who were taken too soon, in this treacherous, and criminal incursion into our nation. Their loss has fueled a new purpose in me and my beautiful wife, Isabella,

On cue, Isabella walks from the group and takes her place at her husband's side. Carlos' eyes soften as he gazes at his wife beside him.

CARLOS (CHOKING) (CONT'D)

This foundation will be for the improved quality of life for all in our nation.

There is a scattering of applause from the onlookers before a technician signals them to quiet down and Carlos can continue.

CARLOS (CLEARS HIS THROAT) (CONT'D)

As I bring this talk to an end. Remember, though, that what we have accomplished , is not also an end, but only th beginning. The beginning of a stronger Mexico. A proudly imdependent Mexico!

As he closes, the camera zooms in for his final words.

Carlos raises a closed fist above his head, eyes sparking, his voice bold and inspirational.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Viva Mexico! Viva nuestra gente!
And Venceramos!

The camera stops recording. There's a palpablesilence before the room erupts in enthusiasti cheers.

Carlos turns toward Isabell.He Pulls her close, And as she gazes into her face , she exhibits a newfound admiration for her husband.

CARLOS (SOFTLY, TO HIS WIFE) (CONT'D)
 Everything I've done, Isabella, has
 been for the boys, for you, and for
 Mexico. I love you, my dear.

Tears well in Isabella's eyes, but she doesn't let them fall.
 She nods, then speaks, her voice barely above a whisper.

ISABELLA
 I know. And I love you, my husband.
 And I forgive you. For everything.
 I see now that you did what you had
 to do.

Carlos pulls her tighter, burying his face in her hair, her
 hand cover his face. The pain of losing their sons had almost
 torn them apart, but now, they seem to have found peace, and
 a stronger bond in the sweeping events that have transpired
 around them.

They pull slowly apart. Carlos steps forward, and up to,
 Raul, who has been taking in the speech. He embraces Raul in
 a brotherly hug.

CARLOS (SINCERELY TO RAUL)
 Thank you, Raul, my amigo. We would
 not have succeeded without you. You
 were loyal and stood by me through
 everything. I will never forget it!

Raul, stoic as ever, nods as the men pull apart..

RAUL
 It was an honor to follow you,
 Jefe. And I always will! Wherever
 you lead Mexico!

INT. WAR ROOM-NIGHT

The room is brightly lit, with multiple screens showing
 surveillance feeds of the U. S.-Mexico Border. The Secretary
 of Defense (hard-eyed, in his 60s, with an almost fanatical
 resolve)and the CIA Director (arrogant, Ruthless,
 calculating) sit alone, reviewing intelligence reports.

C. I. A. DIRECTOR (FACE SHOWS A BARELY
 CONTROLLED FURY)

This is insanity! We've Spent
 decades fighting these animals and
 their poison! And now we're going
 to buy it? Go into business with
 them?

Secretary of Defense kicks a chair. It rolls away.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (LIVID, ANGRY)
 We might as well hand them the keys
 to our country! Old Man
 Harrison...he's lost his mind. This
 deal. It's a surrender, plain and
 simple.

He's up, pacing, face flushed in anger.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (WILDLY) (CONT'D)
 We've got the firepower. We could
 end this Ramirea and all the
 cartels, once and for all. The way
 we should have long ago. Except for
 bleeding hearts like Harrison. Now
 we're going to treat them like
 they're a goddamn legitimate
 government, for Crissake!

CIA DIRECTOR (STRUGGLING TO CONTROL
 HIS ANGER)
 It's a dP. R, move! That's what it
 is. Just a rotten, old-school PR
 move. The Old Man can spin it any
 way he wants..saving lives...
 destroying Cartel finances and
 power... Whatever!... But really,
 what message does this send? That
 America can be destorted and by a
 two-bit junk dealer. Every
 terrorist, drug and criminal gang
 in the world'll be jumping on this
 bandwagon. Wait and see.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (EVILY)
 Still, we have actionable
 intelligence. E know, or will know,
 where this first fentanyl transfer
 with Ramirez will take place. We
 don't have to sit back and let the
 country be sold to drug dealers.
 Not on my watch! w

The CIA Director looks alarmed for a moment, then thoughtful.

CIA DIRECTOR (HESITATINGLY)
 I don't know. This could be risky.
 /if something goes wrong.

Defense Secretary is exasparrated.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

It won't if your damn spooks can make it look like one of the other cartels was behind it.

CIA DIRECTOR (THOUGHTFUL)

It's possible. It could be done. With the utmost caution and secrecy. We would have plausible deniability.

The Secretary of Defense's eyes narrow.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Exactly! And even if it was uncovered later... By that time, the American people will be so fed up and confused, that they will cheer when they hear that cartel scum have been incinerated before more of their filthy drug could reach American streets. And history will see the action as necessary and honorable.

The two men exchange a look, unspoken agreement passing between them.

CIA DIRECTOR (PRIVATELY) WE DON'T NEED A GREEN LIGHT FOR THIS. OUR OATH TO THE CONSTITUTION REQUIRES US TO ACT AND IT ALSO SHIELDS US IN WHAT WE MUST DO.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Yes, sometimes, to protect the country, patriots are compelled to act!

They sit in silence for a moment, the weight of their decision settling over them.

CIA DIRECTOR

NO ONE ELSE MUST EVER KNOW!

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (ADAMANT)

/yes, and that includes your spooks nest. I don't trust anyone!

They share a dark, knowing glance, their conspiracy sealed.

Int. oval Office-Night

The room is dimly lit, the atmosphere more relaxed than formal. President Edward Harrison sits behind his desk, with David Foster and Press Secretary Rogers seated before him. They all seem serious but content.

PRESIDENT (CALMLY)

Thank you both for coming on such short notice ...and I'm sure you are curious as to why I have asked you here, so I won't keep you in suspense...I've Been discussing this with my wife for quite a while and considering it for a long time but, I've decided after all we've accomplished, it's... it's... that I've decided not to run for another term.

David and Press secretary exchange surprised glances.

DAVID (HESITANT)

Sir, are you sure about this?
You've done so much. The people will easily reelect you, i'm sure.

The President gives David a look of gratitude,

Thank you, David, Whether you are right or not, it is time for me to hand this job to another. I am sure and I

Am happy with what we have accomplished... and I want to thank you both again. Your assistance was crucial to our success.

The Press Secretary looks sadly at the President.

PRESS SECRETARY ROGERS (CHOKING
SLIGHTLY)

Mr. President. What will the
nation... what will we do without
you?

The President looks at her as he might a daughter,
gratefully.

PRESIDENT (JOKINGLY)

This great nation has gotten along
for almost 250 years without me.
I'm sure it will muddle through
another four somehow.

The president's levity lowers the tension and breaks the
somber atmosphere. yet he begins again on a more serious
tone.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

I realize that now. I'm Not getting
any younger. And this job is meant
for a younger person than I.
Besides my family needs me and I
need them. This fight, this
effort... though noble and a
necessary undertaking took a lot
out of me. Yet, I have no doubt
that I would undertake it again, in
a heartbeat.

David and Sarah nod and murmur their agreements.

PRESIDENT (KNOWINGLY) (CONT'D)

Still, just because I'm stepping
back, doesn't mean the new path
we've begun should be left
unattended. That new direction,
along with the country needs a
steady hand, one that will direct
it into a marvelous future. Someone
with integrity, strength. Someone
who understands the stakes and will
steer our ship of state through any
rocky roads it encounters. And...
David... I believe that person is
you!

David is stunned. Sarah grabs his arm, a smile from ear-to-
ear, The President is looking at him intently, his approval
and excitement evident

evident.

SARAH (UNABLE TO CONTROL HER
CONCURRENCE)

/yes, Mr. President. You are so
right. I have no doubt ,either ,
that David is the person to fill
your shoes.

David leans forward toward the President. We see he is god
macked.

DAVID (STUNNED)

Me, Sir? Run for president?

PRESIDENT (NODS, FIRMLY)

Yes, you, David! You've been my
closest advisor, my confidant
through my entire time in office.
You've made the hard calls, and
your advice has always been spot
on. And you have the respect of the
American people. They know you.
They like and trust you. I believe
you can handle this position, and
do a better job than anyone else I
can think of. And I will back you
every step of the way.

Sarah looks at David with a sense of newfound admiration, but
also a small hint of doubt.

SARAH (SMILING, BUT CAUTIOUS)

David, This is so exciting. I agree
with the President. You are ready
for this. you would be wonderful.
You can do this!...

The President glances at Sarah.

PRESIDENT (SPEAKING OVER HER)

And Madam Secretary, I didn't ask
you here just to be an observer.

Sarah looks expectantly, quizzically at the President.

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Sarah, if David is agreeable, I
think you should come onboard as
David's chief advisor... his Chief
of Staff. You will be at his side,
as he was with me. David's going to
need someone like you, Sarah.
Believe me, I know.

Sarah recoils, visibly shocked. For a short minute she is speechless, then hesitatingly begins,

SARAH SMILING WARMLY)
David is obviously pleased.

DAVID (ENTHUSIASTICALLY)
/yes, Sarah, I would be so grateful
if you would take this position.

Sarah laughs softly, out of surprise and pleasure.

ABBY ? (FERFENTLY)
David, if you start on this
journey. I will be proud to be with
you 100%.

David and the President both beam at her acceptance.

INT. OVAL OFFICE-DAY

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EXT. HACIENDA-NIGHT

The night air is cool, with a slight breeze, as Carlos stand outside the hacienda. They are smoking and passing a bottle of tequila. The celebratory crowd is dispersing from the hacienda and heading for their vehicles.

CARLOS (SMILING, HAPPY AND CONFIDENT)
 You know, hermano, We are just beginning. We've spent years building an empire in the shadows. Now, we will rebuild it, unashamed, and in the light.

RAUL (NODDING)
 I/t' is what wyouve always wanted, Carlos. A better future--for us, For Mexico.

Carlos turns to Raul, his expression softening. He places a hand on Raul's shoulder, his eyes filled with a rare moment of vulnerability.

CARLOS
 I couldn't have done this without you, Raul. From the start you have beenby my side. Through the blood and danger... through evry difficult decision I have made. I always knew I had you to count on.

RAUL
 It was an honor to follow you. I never doubted you for a minute and I would do it all again, /you were the brains and I willingly just followed your orders.

CARLOS (SHAKING HIS HEAD)
 No, hermano, You've been my rock... You and Isabella. you and now i must ask for your assistance once more.

Raul looks at him, intrigued. Carlos gestures off into the distance, his eyes almost dreamy.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
 I am going in a new direction. Something good! Something real!

RAUL (ANXIOUSLY)
 What is it, Carlos? What are you
 planning?

CARLOS (ENTHUSIASTIC)
 Legal enterprises, business
 ventures that will lift us, our
 families, our people, all of Mexico
 into a glorious future

Carlos hesitates. Looks admiringly at Raul, then continue.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
 But I can't do it alone, my friend.
 I want you by my side. As my
 partner--my equal.

RAUL (CAUGHT OFF GUARD)
 Carlos..I... I don't know what to
 say.

CARLOS (SMILING BROADLY)
 Say ye, my brother. We will build
 something wonderful! Together. But
 before we begin, I need you to
 handle one final task : Overseeing
 of the Fentanyl transfer to the
 Yanquis. You will handle the
 oiperation. Make sure a system is
 constructed to keep it operating
 for as long as it is needed. You
 will have to coordinate with any of
 the other cartels that wish to
 funnel their product through us to
 the Americans, And you will have to
 deal with the northerners. That
 will not be an easy task. They are
 treacherous vbastards, as we know
 from the past. You will have your
 hands full and from all directions.
 You must ensure it is done clean
 and that it is set up for
 indefinite use and to run like a
 well-oiked machine, no loose ends,

RAUL (SMILING, PROUD)
 It will be an honor, Carlos. I will
 take care of it. You have nothing
 to worry about.

A long pause. The weight of their shared history and mutual
 admiration settling in. Raul turns to face Carlos fully, his
 admiration clear.

RAUL (QUIZICALLY) (CONT'D)
 There is something else to Carlos.
 Is there not? I sense it.

Carlos raises his eyebrows, mildly surprised that Raul understands him this well.

CARLOS (SMILING)
 You know me so well. I could never hide anything from you. Nor would I want to. /it is politics, Raul. We must become involved, if we want our dreams for our families and Mexico to be realized. It is necessary!Not Only a new era for Mexico, but for us as well. One where we aren't hunted like animals, but respected as pillars of the nation. This field will be the last key to bringing our plans to bloom. And I want you by my side, on this too, when the time comes.

RAUL (CONSPIRATORRIL)
 President Ramirez. It has a nice sound to it.

They share a laugh and swigs on the tequila bottle. There is a deep sincerity beneath the lightheartedness. Each believes this is possible, they have no doubt. The weight of their bond and the road ahead lingers.

CARLOS (QUIETLY, ALMOST TO HIMSEL)
 The road ahead will be difficult though, Raul.

RAUL (COCKSURE)
 Not with you leading, and me close behind,Jefe.Nothing Will stop us!

Carlos pulls Raul into a brief but tight embrace. They stand side by side again, gazing out over the hacienda toward the horizon. Their past lives receding , as the dawn of their lives, approaches.

CARLOS (WITH A MIXTURE OF PRIDE AND DETERMINATION)
 To the future. Our's and Mexico's!

He raises the tequila bottle toward the horizon, takes a pull, then hands the bottle to Raul , who takes a pull and raises the bottle high.

RAUL . (DETERMIND, EXCITEDLY)
To the future!

OVAL OFFICE- NIGHT

David sits behind the Presidential desk, his face etched in tension. Abby, his Chief of Staff rushes in.

ABBY (URGENT)
Sir, we have a situation. Keenan and Halverson have gone off the reservation. Their people have conducted a drone strike on Ramirez's men at the fentanyl transfer site. Several have been killed.

David is stunned, his eyes flare with anger. He slams his fist on the desk.

DAVID (FURIOUS)
What! Have they gone mad? This was to be the first transfer. I gave Ramirez my word there would be no trickery. Without my approval? This could ruin everything The fools! I Want them arrested. Get Justice on the line--now. See what options I have.

Before Abby can respond, her aide, a very young man, enters, holding a small piece of paper, Looking puzzled he hands it to Abby.

ABBY'S AIDE
This just came in ... from Mr. Ramirez.

Abby unfolds the paper, looks at it, sees one word, that we see too--CARFENTANIL. She looks at it quizically, before handing it to David, who has anxiously held out his hand. He stares intently at the paper.

ABBY
What does it mean, sir?

DAVID (OMINOUSLY)
Carfentanil... It's a synthetic, opiate ...100 times more powerful than fentanyl.

David looks intently, again, at the paper. As he does,
He has a flashback to words Carlos had said to him earlier.

CARLOS (V. O.)
If I am betrayed, I will flood the
United States with a enough
Carfentanil to make a billion
counterfeit pills.

David absorbs the words, a mixture of shock and anger on his
face. He obviously is dwelling on Carlos' words and the
realization of the enormity of the situation now. The room is
silent, the tension palpable.

DAVID (TURNING TO ABBY, ALARMED)
Ramirez said if we double-crossed
him, he would flood the /USA with
this Carfentanil garbage!

Abby finishes a phone call, watches David carefully,
studying him. She realizes the inner struggle he is facing.
After a beat, she steps forward, her expression, unsure, for
once...

ABBY (HESITANT)
Mr. President, What should we do
now? Justice Says you have the
authority to have Keenan and
Haverson arrested. Or you could
order the elimination of Ramirez.
Although we can't be sure, his
subordinates won't follow through
with his threat. Or maybe you can
reason with him. ?You had a
rapport. Unless, of course,
Halverson and Keena Carry out some
additional action against him or
his organization. I Think time is of
the essence for your decision, Sir.
What are your orders?

David looks up, his eyes locking with Abby's. There's
uncertainty in his eyes-- a man who must make an impossible
decision. Any possible blowback from an action is too
unthinkable to predict. Although it could be catastrophic.
But to not act, may also unleash an unimagineable result.

DAVID (QUIET, INTENSE)
I don't know...yet.

A long pause follows. David faces the window, gazes out, his
reflection a shadow against the stormy outdoors.

A decision he must make looms over him--whatever he chooses could either destroy or save countless lives.

ABBY (OFFERING, COMFORTING)

Sir, Would you like a suggestion?

David's jaw tightens. He doesn't respond immediately, until, a look of resolve washes over his face.

He looks up locking eyes with his advisor, his voice steady but firm.

DAVID

No thank you, Abby. But this one is mine... all mine.

The room falls silent. David turns back to the window, staring out into the night, alone with the weight of a decision that will shape the nation's future. His jaw tightens, but his eyes are clear. Almost as if he is seeing something we can't. He is ready.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

(CONT'D)

