

Deadline

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"DEADLINE"TEASER

FADE IN

INT. MC DONALD'S - NIGHT

SUPER: CHICAGO. LAST NIGHT.

Just before closing. A half dozen customers are finishing up their Big Macs and Happy Meals. A seventeen year old is mopping the floor. The doors swing open and two blacks in their late twenties walk in, bundled up against the winter wind. They both have on heavy coats and gloves. One, Tyrell, sports cornrowed hair, a mustache and a full, closely-cropped beard. About 6'2", there's an aura of restrained pain-giving traveling with him. His partner, Delroy, sports a Chicago Bears watch cap on top of his considerably shorter body. They both go up to the counter where Monique, a cute twenty year old, is starting to cash out the register.

MONIQUE

We're closed.

DELROY

(pointing to clock)

Eleven fifty-five...We still got five minutes.

Tyrell pulls out a twenty, leans across the counter with a sexy smile and snaps it seductively.

TYRELL

Plus, we don't want no change.

Monique glances towards the kitchen, then turns back.

MONIQUE

'Long's as you eat fast.

DELROY

It's fast food, ain't' it? Two Big Macs. Two large fries. Two Cokes.

MONIQUE

(ringing it up)

Nine-ninety.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Tyrell hands her the twenty without taking his gloves off. She starts to hand him change, but he closes his hand around hers.

TYRELL

I tol' you -- that's for you.

Two of the remaining customers get up and leave. There's only a table for four left still eating. Dennis, the twenty-two-year-old manager, comes out of the back, glances at Tyrell and Delroy with mild annoyance as Monique puts their drinks and Big Macs on the counter, crosses to the front door, locks it from the bottom and waves to an n.d. sedan parked across the street before heading back to the kitchen area. Monique puts their fries into the cardboard carry tray.

MONIQUE

You got lucky...last fries. You want catsup?

TYRELL

(shaking head)

So. Monique. You want to go to a party?

MONIQUE

How you know my name?

Tyrell points to a framed "Employee of the Month" award.

TYRELL

That's you, right?

MONIQUE

It's Sunday. I got a nine o'clock class..

TYRELL

You can go right from the party.

MONIQUE

My boyfriend'd kill me...

TYRELL

(big smile)

Not if I kill his ass first.

DELROY

Shut up, Tyrell.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

TYRELL
 (to Monique)
 I'm just messing with you, 'Nique.

The table for four gets up to leave. The floor mopper opens the locked front door, lets the foursome out and relocks it behind them as Tyrell and Delroy take their food over to a table. They finally take their gloves off when they sit down, but don't touch or eat anything except the fries. The manager comes out of the back and crosses to Monique's register.

MANAGER
 You cashed out?

MONIQUE
 Just about.

MANAGER
 (to Mopper)
 Do the kitchen, Willie.

The kid nods and follows Dennis back into the back. As Tyrell and Delroy chew on their fries, Monique takes the cash from the register and goes into the back. A beat later, they pull on their gloves, reach into their jackets and follow her.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Dennis, Monique, the Mopper and two other employees look up as Tyrell and Delroy enter the kitchen. There's a small safe open and a pile of cash that Dennis has been counting. Monique lets out a terrified moan when she sees the guns.

TYRELL
 Don't you worry, baby -- ain't nobody gonna get capped here.

He flicks the barrel of the .45 towards the ceiling and five pairs of hands go up. Delroy crosses to Dennis and starts stuffing the cash in his jacket.

TYRELL
 Everybody down on the floor.
 (to Willie)
 Yo Willie -- that floor nice and clean?

Willie nods his head up and down, up and down -- his eyes buggin'.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

TYRELL

Good -- now, everybody face down.

As he kneels, then lies prone:

CUT TO

INT. N.D. SEDAN - NIGHT

Louise, a pretty, very pregnant twenty-one year old is sitting in the driver's seat of the car Dennis had waved at. She's reading The National Enquirer with the interior light on when she reacts to a fusillade of shots across the street. Reacting instinctively, she turns off the light and swivels to look at the front of the restaurant in time to see Tyrell lean down, unlock the front door and emerge on the sidewalk with Delroy right behind him. They're both bathed in the overhead light of a street lamp and Tyrell's cornrowed hair and beard are clearly visible. They look around and head off down the street as she slumps down in the seat. She waits for them to turn the corner before getting out of the car and trundling across the street as fast as her seven month pregnant body will let her.

INT. MC DONALD'S - NIGHT

Louise enters.

LOUISE

Denny?

Silence. She transits the restaurant and goes into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

As soon as she enters, she sees the five bodies laid out in a row, a large pool of blood growing under them. She screams and screams, the sound reverberating and holding into the black as we...

FADE OUT

END OF TEASER

SMASH CUT

MAIN TITLES:

ACT ONE

FADE IN

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

The bass blaahht of a diesel bus engine pulls the full screen head shot of Wallace Benton from left to right, followed by "Wallace Benton writes 'Nothing But The Truth' Every Wednesday in the New York Ledger," the last three words in the tabloid's logo type with its distinctive red underline. The bus clears frame, revealing our eponymous columnist walking briskly with three newspapers and a deli coffee cup in his hands -- it's as if he's trying to keep up with his own image, but failing. He continues to the front of a dirty neo-classic marble facade with New York Ledger over the door, and pushes inside.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Two uniformed guards -- old white-haired throwbacks -- sit behind a counter with a security monitor, plus a TV on in the background.

GUARD

'Morning, Mister Benton.

WALLACE

'Morning, Mister O'Dwyer. What's new?

GUARD

(an old routine)

Nothing under the sun.

He jerks a thumb at the TV -- we see the CNN logo.

GUARD

Big rub-out in Chicago.

WALLACE

-- Oh?

GUARD #2

At a McDonald's.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE
(stopping in his
tracks)

Oh.

(sotto)

Oh, shit.

He dashes for the elevators, hits the button, then takes the stairs.

CUT TO

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

The 20th Century meets the 21st. One of the last of the newsrooms that physically overlook the huge linotype presses on the floor below. Intermittently, the normal sounds of the fourth estate -- ringing phones, shouted questions, Xerox machines, keyboards tapping -- is interrupted by a loud bell and the roar of the presses accelerating. Wallace enters, panting and flushed.

WALLACE

Sean!

He waves as various reporters look up from their computers and say good morning -- the wave is more like "go away" than "hello."

INT. WALLACE'S CUBICLE - DAY

He drops the papers with a thud, hits some keys, then stands twitching over his computer. A bellow of frustration.

WALLACE

Sean. Sean!

A very competent, very used-to-this assistant/head researcher sticks his head in.

SEAN

Good morning, Wallace...

WALLACE

(vaguely accusing)
I'm trying to get online here.
Today's Chicago papers. It's broken,
again.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

SEAN

I read the Drudge report -- nothing
you don't already know...

WALLACE

Just fix it.

Sean punches up the Chicago Sun-Times with three key strokes
and moves away.

SEAN

Fixed.

Wallace is already scanning the lead story: "Five-Executed
In Fast Food Robbery."

WALLACE

God almighty...

INT. ARLEEN MASUCCI'S OFFICE - DAY

The 33-year-old wunderkind looks up at Wallace with a
confused expression. She's got a mensa-level I.Q., a small
hard body and a feral expression that scares the hell out of
everybody on the floor but Wallace. Depending on the
circumstances, she treats him like a fractious child or a
large dog who's not very well trained and occasionally bites.

ARLEEN

Yeah. So?

WALLACE

So it's exactly the same M.O.?

ARLEEN

Define exactly.

WALLACE

Sunday night. Just before closing.
Last customers. Don't eat anything
they order -- don't even sip the
straws. No prints. No DNA. Lay
everybody down on the floor and shoot
them in the head.

(beat)

You see the problem here?

ARLEEN

What problem?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

Bradford and Washington are going to be executed because of me.

ARLEEN

What is this, 'I the Jury'? Twelve angry people convicted them, and a judge sentenced them to death, not you.

WALLACE

Right -- all I did was lead the cheering section.

ARLEEN

Look -- you won the Pulitzer. You helped boost circulation by two hundred thousand. What do you want to be? The next Janet Cook? You going to say the cops and the D.A. put the wrong people away based on a copycat crime in a fly-over state?

WALLACE

I'm saying they may not be guilty...I don't want two incorrect executions screwing with my karma.

ARLEEN

And that's kinda like the Marquis de Sade saying 'Sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you.' Or Larry King saying 'Til death do us part.'

WALLACE

Save it for the Borscht Belt, Arleen.

Wallace is out the door. Arleen stumbles out of her chair and follows him, leans into the hall and yells at his disappearing back.

ARLEEN

Or Mick Jagger saying 'Don't worry, I've had a vasectomy.'

INT. SHOOTING RANGE - DAY

Sam Postel, a world-weary Jewish detective in his 40's, wearing ear protectors and shooting glasses, rapid fires a Glock at a silhouette target. Wallace stands just behind him, his fingers in his ears, his body jerking with each shot as he yells at the cop.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

I talked to one of the cops in Chicago
-- they only ate the fries.

A "yeah so" look from Postel as he ejects the clip and pulls one of Wallace's hands away from his head.

WALLACE

(still yelling)

That little detail was never publicized. Not by me -- not by anyone.

POSTEL

What's your point?

WALLACE

A copycat couldn't have known about it, that's what.

Postel hits a button and the target comes back. The head is blown out. He puts a new one in place as he talks. Wallace's eyes keep drifting to the mutilated target.

POSTEL

And guess what? A gun was used in both crimes.

WALLACE

Don't patronize me, Sam.

The detective cocks an eyebrow, reloads and sends the new target down the range.

POSTEL

See? That's the difference between cops and reporters. You like to think we work the same side of the street, but one little crack, and you get all thin-skinned and sensitive.

WALLACE

I'm sensitive about two innocent men being put to death.

POSTEL

Washington and Bradford? A couple of Goniffs. Besides, if they didn't do this one, there are nine hundred and twelve other felonies they slid on.

Postel squeezes off another clip, Wallace covers his ears with a yelp of pain, as he starts yelling again.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

You were the one who told me how important the french fries were. That they knew about DNA. They never put the straws in their mouth...

POSTEL

Even 'inner-city youths' read how guys are getting out of prison because of DNA...and vice versa.

WALLACE

Bradford and Washington are on gurneys in ten days.

POSTEL

I don't care.

WALLACE

You're Jewish. You're genetically incapable of not caring.

POSTEL

(reloading clip)
Go back over your clips, Wallace. Remember how they were convicted of four other Sunday night fast food robberies with exactly the same M.O.?

WALLACE

In which they didn't touch anybody, let alone mass murder them.

POSTEL

You know how these things go down... all the others went smooth, this one got hinky. Somebody recognized somebody. Somebody had a gun...

Wallace starts to protest. Postel holds up a hand, frustrated.

POSTEL

You know anything I don't?

Wallace looks at him and touches the side of his nose with his index finger -- he smells it. Postel waves his hand in front of his face.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

POSTEL
Your 'nose for news?' Please.

Wallace smiles thinly, not amused.

WALLACE
Sam -- was I just seeing...
imagining...a dismissive hand wave?

A slight edge. A distant rumble of "you're pissing me off."
A switch has been thrown. This is not an Wallace you'd want
to fuck with. Postel becomes placating.

POSTEL
Wallace...

WALLACE
My 'nose for news' was what got you
off the Burglary squad in Queens and
into Homicide in Manhattan.

The marker's been called. Postel sighs.

POSTEL
What do you need?

INT. MRS. BENTON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Wallace's jacket is draped over a chair in an Architectural
Digest level living room.

WALLACE (V.O.)
You know, Mother...

He reenters, sits and resumes signing real estate papers as
his spectacularly good-looking seventy-year-old mother, the
former showgirl Bonnie McGuinness, makes stock trades on her
computer.

WALLACE
--...the neighbors aren't going to be
happy.

MRS. BENTON
Oh, I don't know. At least they won't
have you as a neighbor anymore.

(breezy)
You never see black sheep grazing at
the Maidstone Club. And the Hamptons
need a good nursing home.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

She's strong, opinionated, but clearly good hearted. With her, we see a different side of Wallace -- he obviously adores her without reservation, and there's a part of him that retreats to being ten years old.

WALLACE

What if you don't get the zoning variance?

MRS. BENTON

I've never backed down from a fight. That's where you get it from. It's why your father married me.

WALLACE

He married you because you could crack walnuts between your knees.

MRS. BENTON

(a smile of memory)

I was dancing eight shows a week when we met.

WALLACE

From Bye-bye Birdie to Hello, Money.

MRS. BENTON

How sharper than a serpent's tooth, to have Don Quixote for a son.

WALLACE

You're most beautiful when you're mangling your references, Mother.

His cell phone chirps. He answers with an apologetic look.

WALLACE

Yeah.

(listening)

Yeah. Okay -- leave them on top of the pile.

He clicks off, then --

WALLACE

Sean -- he's found four other Sunday night fast food murders in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois -- all since Bradford and Washington were convicted.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

MRS. BENTON
Remember Ramon?

WALLACE
The gardener at the cottage...

MRS. BENTON
(nodding)
He loved your father. They'd spend
hours together planting bulbs.

WALLACE
I always wondered what happened to
him.

MRS. BENTON
Some tools disappeared. All the
'evidence' pointed to Ramon. Your
father went ape -- he told Ramon he'd
never felt so betrayed. Then he fired
him.

WALLACE
And?

MRS. BENTON
Ramon hanged himself two weeks later.
Three weeks after that it turned out
that the pool man had been stealing
tools all over the south fork.

The two look at each other for a long beat. Wallace crosses
to the window, looks out and finally turns, clearly having
had his buttons pushed.

WALLACE
You're saying I was blinded by outrage
when I convicted Bradford and
Washington in my column.

MRS. BENTON
-- I'm saying that, unlike your father,
you have a second chance.

INT. COLUMBIA SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM - DAY

Head shots of two young black males fill the screen. One
has a shaved head, goatee and mustache with 'Bradford'
scrawled under it. The other has smaller sharper features
and short, tight hair, 'Washington' scrawled under him.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Definitely not two guys you'd want to meet in a dark alley. (But they don't look like the guys in the teaser.) We're in Wallace's seminar on investigative journalism.

FOSTER (V.O.)

You're damn right your coverage was racist.

Pulling back on the sound cut, we see that the seminar room is occupied by eight very bright, very opinionated students in their twenties. Foster, black, attitude, flashing eyes is going nose-to-nose with Wallace. Wallace is goading him, but Foster doesn't realize it. Across the table, Beth Lowell, watches... no, observes... the rising temperature with something akin to bemusement.

FOSTER

People were really pissed off. It 'kind of defined 'insensitive.'

WALLACE

(you can't be serious)

Racist? Insensitive? Four out of the five victims were black or Hispanic. One was pregnant.

FOSTER

You might have noticed...the correct term is African-American?

WALLACE

And you want to be a reporter? That's the politically correct term. America the melting pot. Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, Greek-Americans? They're just Irish, Italians or Greeks. So I take it you want me to call you an African?

Beth decides to throw oil on the water.

BETH

How do you want to split this up?

WALLACE

(breaking off)

You and Fung take the eyewitnesses.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Presley, an intense twenty-six year old from the Midwest, looks up dubiously.

PRESLEY

You know what the current research is on reliability of eyewitness testimony?

WALLACE

In this case? Nine different people picked them out of line-ups. One hundred per cent. Pretty reliable. But I want transcripts of everything -- arraignment, motions, trial, appeals -- ...Morrow, help him on the appeals.

(to Presley)

You and Wentzel want to take the physical evidence?

FOSTER

(still seething)

Why are you bothering with this?

(sarcastic)

Altruism...white man's burden?

WALLACE

What makes you think I'm white?

Foster stares: huh?

WALLACE

I look like a white man, but do a DNA test, who knows what you'd find.

(beat)

Am I clear?

FOSTER

Not really.

WALLACE

Facts, people. Picasso had anatomy -- down cold before he started re-arranging faces. Journalists need those old tired who what when and wheres before they can get to the why.

BETH

Think you shot from the hip on Bradford and Washington?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

He stares at her, intently. Then:

WALLACE

I hope not -- but at least it gives me
a case study for this semester.

He looks around the table. It's clear they're not at all
sure whether he's serious or not.

CUT TO

INT. NEW YORK LEDGER - DAY

Wallace comes off the elevator at eighty miles-an-hour. As
he heads for the newsroom he's intercepted by Sean.

SEAN

There's somebody in your office.

WALLACE

Why?

SEAN

Couldn't figure out a way to throw a
sixty-five-year-old woman out on her
ass.

He turns to leave, but is stopped dead by a strong voice.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Mr. Benton.

Wallace braces himself, then turns with a welcoming smile on
his face.

WALLACE

Hello, Mrs. Washington...you're
looking well.

MRS. WASHINGTON

I had to go all over the city to find
a Chicago paper after my sister
called.

She waves the *Sun-Times* at him.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Well this proves it.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE
Proves what, ma'am?

MRS. WASHINGTON
(you idiot)
That my son is not a murderer.

WALLACE
There are striking similarities,
but...

MRS. WASHINGTON
Striking? You know that Reggie was at
a family wedding. You can't believe
that somebody can go from best man to
murderer.

WALLACE
The evidence was overwhelming --
Besides, the murders happened an hour
after he left the party...

MRS. WASHINGTON
The boy had some problems, but he was
never violent. Not ever. I can live
with him being in prison for other
things he done, but this ain't right.

Wallace sighs, looks at his shoes, knowing what's coming.

WALLACE
I'm looking into it.

Mrs. Washington's jaw starts to quiver.

MRS. WASHINGTON
Are you? Then look hard Mister Benton
-- look real hard.

INT. DES ARTISTES - NIGHT

Elliot walks in from the street, descends the half flight of
stairs to the sunken lobby and walks into the elevator.

INT. DES ARTISTES ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Hector, the elevator man, looks at Wallace with easy
familiarity. He may know more about Wallace's personal life
-- who comes and goes, how he's feeling -- than anybody on
the planet.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

He can also judge his mood with a glance, knows his editor, his publisher, his three ex-wives, when to cover for him and certainly when to warn him.

WALLACE

Hector.

HECTOR

Mr. Benton...Mrs. Benton's upstairs.

WALLACE

Which one?

Hector holds up his index finger. Wallace nods.

INT. WALLACE'S APARTMENT - DAY

A two-bedroom duplex. A twenty-two foot high living room with a wall of windows is surrounded on two sides by a balcony with the bedrooms off it. Wallace's had it forever -- the one thing that he's been able to keep through three divorces. Brooke, wife number one, haute-WASP, tall, good-looking. She and Wallace have known each other since Grace Church pre-school. She's straightening up as Wallace walks in warily.

BROOKE

Don't worry, I was in the neighborhood and just dropped by to see if you're going to the Van Rensselaer wedding.

WALLACE

Since Randolph's my first cousin, I don't have a lot of choice. Why? Are you?

BROOKE

(nodding)

I'm taking somebody. I just didn't -- want you to be surprised.

WALLACE

Who?

BROOKE

Don't be catty -- he's actually a self-made zillionaire -- started Compu-something in his garage.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE
Perfect -- how much better than a poor
ink-stained wretch.

BROOKE
He's very nice.

WALLACE
I'm sure he is.
(the phone rings)
Hello?...Can you pick me up?...I'll be
outside.
(hangs up; to
Brooke)
I'll be on my best behavior.

EXT. DES ARTISTES - NIGHT

Wallace's on the sidewalk with Brooke as a BMW sedan pulls to the curb and Beth hops out wearing a bright yellow parka, her cropped blonde hair glowing in the moonlight. The two women, separated by fifteen years but joined by mutual inclusion in the Social Register, check each other out. They could be first cousins.

WALLACE
Brooke Benton...Beth Lowell.

BETH
Nice to meet you, Mrs. Benton.

Brooke's mind has already leaped to all kinds of conclusions. One of those moments. She smiles sweetly at Beth.

BROOKE
Ah, a Lowell. Wallace, you've had
Cabots before, but never a Lowell,
have you?

-- (kisses Wallace on
the cheek)
I'll see you at the wedding...

She turns and Wallace and Beth watch her walk toward Central Park West.

BETH
Wow.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

Tell me about it. So -- everything set?

BETH

Exactly the way you told me...

They climb into the BMW.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Wallace, Foster, Presley, Wentzel, Morrow and a couple of others from the class are gathered on a corner across from a McDonald's on the far corner.

WENTZEL

I went through the transcript with a fine tooth comb -- they didn't get railroaded, that's for sure. I mean, there's no possibility of doubt on the first four robberies.

FOSTER

Where nobody was even hurt.

WENTZEL

For the last one, there were two eyewitnesses who were right here when they came out.

WALLACE

Nothing's changed, right?

MORROW

Down to the same wattage in the street lights,

WALLACE

And they were right here?

MORROW

A hundred and sixty-two feet from the entrance.

FOSTER

Here they come...

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

The doors swing open and two girls come out. One's Beth, clearly visible in her yellow parka and blonde hair and the other's Fung, the Asian girl from the seminar.

FOSTER
So they're junk-food junkies -- so what?

WALLACE
Who is?

FOSTER
Fung and Beth. Obviously.

WALLACE
Cut and dried.

FOSTER
That's right.

WALLACE
So you'd testify to it?

FOSTER
Of course.

WALLACE
Wentzel?

WENTZEL
Yes.

MORROW
Absolutely.

FOSTER
This pproves nothing.

BETH (V.O.)
Yes. It does.

They all turn. Beth, wearing a different coat and a watch cap, is facing them. She pulls off the cap and shakes her blonde hair free. Wallace looks at the students, clearly concerned.

WALLACE
So much for the I.D.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN

EXT. FOLEY SQUARE - DAY

A copy of a folded-in-half Ledger fills the screen, a banner across the top proclaiming: In Nothing But The Truth -- "I'm Having Second Thoughts." It's dumped into a trash can, ditched by Walter Fresco, an Executive Assistant District Attorney who walks and talks with Wallace. A friend for the past fifteen years. Another side of Wallace. Respectful. The first person (aside from his mother) that he treats as a true equal. And right now, Fresco is furious.

FRESCO

Why didn't you call me? You forget how to use a damn phone?

WALLACE

If you'd read the piece, Walter, you'd know I went out there myself.

FRESCO

I know -- With your J-school groupies and a measuring tape.

WALLACE

You sound jealous.

FRESCO

(ignoring)

If you had called I would've told you not to write the story because you'd be wrong.

WALLACE

And you're sure.

FRESCO

No. I'm not sure. I'm positive.

WALLACE

How can you be?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

FRESCO
Because there was other evidence.

WALLACE
What other evidence?

FRESCO
Evidence that wasn't presented at the trial.

WALLACE
Like what?

FRESCO
Things that were...inadmissible.

WALLACE
Such as? You told me that you told me everything.

FRESCO
I didn't tell you things that were inadmissible, for God's sake. You would have written about it.

WALLACE
Yeah. So?

FRESCO
It would have been incredibly prejudicial and I probably would have been disbarred.

WALLACE
(stoked)
That prejudicial? What was it?

Fresco throws up his hands.

FRESCO
Both Bradford and Washington wanted to take lie detector tests.

WALLACE
And you wouldn't allow it?

FRESCO
Are you kidding? I was glad to accommodate them.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

And?

FRESCO

And they both flunked.

The news rocks Wallace. Fresco nods.

FRESCO

Twice.

(beat)

Satisfied?

INT. COLUMBIA SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM - DAY

The screen is split by the two large head shots of Bradford and Washington, their names still underneath them.

WALLACE (V.O.)

I may have gone off half-cocked.

We pan off the head shots to see a pissed-off Foster react to a clearly conflicted Wallace's words.

FOSTER

Polygraph tests aren't admissible because they're not a hundred per cent reliable. We saw how unreliable the eyewitness testimony was.

WALLACE

So now what? Opposites prove the same thing? They fail a lie detector test, they're innocent. Eyewitness testimony wasn't challenged properly and they're innocent.

WENTZEL

And there's no proof that all the eyewitnesses were unreliable.
-- Multiple eyewitnesses picked them out on the first four robberies.

FUNG

So then why would they start killing people when they hadn't even fired a shot in any of the others?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

The questions and answers are flying back and forth at warp speed. The Socratic method gone amuck

PRESLEY

Hey, bottom line? A jury convicted them.

BETH

I'd say the media, especially our esteemed teacher, might have had something to do with that since the jury wasn't sequestered.

FOSTER

Amen.

WALLACE

I was there. Believe me, it was a no brainer.

FOSTER

For the man with second thoughts.

WALLACE

Who's now having thirds.
(looking around)
Anybody got anything to give me fourths?

BETH

I've been checking out Sheila Johnson.
(Wallace's lost)
The assistant manager who had been at two of the first four robberies.

WALLACE

(remembering)
She was supposed to be on duty the night of the murders but had the flu.

PRESLEY

-Talk about a lucky break...

BETH

(nodding)
She's disappeared.

WALLACE

What's that supposed to mean?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

BETH

She quit right after the trial. She's not listed in New York. She's not listed in the United States. All I've got is a last known address...

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET - DAY

Beth's BMW sedan pulls to the curb and she and Wallace climb out.

BETH

Do I get mileage or anything?

WALLACE

No.

BETH

I could drive your car.

WALLACE

Why would I have a car? I don't even have a license.

Beth glances nervously at a scary-looking knot of teenagers on the corner and ponders this new piece of information as Wallace, oblivious, crosses to an old man sweeping the stoop of a rundown brownstone. Wallace's respectful, almost diffident, to the octogenarian.

WALLACE

'Afternoon, sir...

OLD MAN

You lost?

Wallace flashes a rueful smile.

WALLACE

I sincerely hope not. You happen to -- know Sheila Johnson?

The Old Man thinks.

OLD MAN

Oh yes -- good people. But they moved away after their moms passed.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE
Know where they went?

OLD MAN
Just the good brother. Lewis. He's a
doctor over at Morrisania.

WALLACE
Okay, well -- thanks for your help.

OLD MAN
Don't mention it.

Wallace smiles. He starts back to the car, then stops.

WALLACE
Good brother...was there a bad one?

OLD MAN
Tyrell. Nobody minded when he moved
away.

EXT. MORRISANIA HOSPITAL E.R. - DAY

Wallace and Beth talk to Dr. Lewis Johnson, 30's.

JOHNSON
I was really surprised that you were
having second thoughts.

WALLACE
With the executions coming up, I'm
having second, third and fourth
thoughts. That's why I'd love to talk
to Sheila, but we can't find her.

JOHNSON
After the trial, she changed her name,
got out of the restaurant business and
went into catering...it kind of
= freaked her out, realizing that she
would have been dead if she hadn't
gotten the flu.

BETH
You think she'd talk to us?

JOHNSON
I'd have to ask her.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Wallace pulls a cell phone out of his pocket.

WALLACE

Give her a call...

JOHNSON

Excuse me...

He walks down the sidewalk until he's out of earshot. Beth looks at Wallace.

BETH

I don't think this falls under the definition of full disclosure.

WALLACE

Loose lips sink ships.

Johnson rejoins them, restrained, almost apologetic.

JOHNSON

I'm really sorry -- she just wants to put it all behind her.

WALLACE

I understand.

(shaking his hand)

Thanks for your help.

JOHNSON

I've gotta get back.

They watch him reenter the hospital. As the air doors shut behind Johnson, Wallace flips open his phone.

WALLACE

Wonders of modern technology...last number redial...

(into phone)

Hi. I'm planning a cocktail party for a hundred and fifty, can you handle

-- that...No, no. I'd prefer to come in.

Uh-huh...six oh eight east Forty-Ninth...see you in about half an hour.

He closes the phone and they cross to Beth's car.

BETH

Are you ever troubled by the fact that you lie as easily as you breath?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE
Tortured by it.

He climbs into the passenger seat. Beth considers the response -- is he serious or putting her on? She's too young to be sure.

INT. CATERING COMPANY - DAY

Wallace and Beth are talking to one of the owners, a guy in a pearl gray suit.

WALLACE
Black. Quite pretty. Tall...about
five eight. Late twenties?

OWNER
Sheila Jesperson. Great girl.

WALLACE
She around?

OWNER
(shaking his head)
She got a call about forty-five
minutes ago. She seemed upset. Said
she was taking some personal time.
(realizing)
Aren't you Wallace Benton?

Wallace looks into the office, moves to one of the desks.

WALLACE
'Fraid so. This Sheila's desk?

The Owner nods. Monday's Chicago Sun-Times is folded on a corner of her desk. Wallace picks it up.

WALLACE
(to Beth)
Chicago paper's circulation up
suddenly.

OWNER
How important is this?

WALLACE
Oh, how about life and death?

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

No doorman, just an intercom with a locking security door. Beth looks down the list of residents.

BETH

Johnson. 10B.

Her hand moves towards the buzzer, but Wallace grabs it and stabs about fifteen buzzers at random, none of them 10B. Disembodied voices come out of the intercom.

VOICES

Who is it...who's there...no menus...

But there are also several buzzes, opening the door. As they move towards the elevator, Wallace glances at Beth.

BETH

I know how tortured you are about lying. So would you break the law to get a story?

WALLACE

Depends on the story.

INT. SHEILA JOHNSON'S APT. BLDG. HALLWAY - DAY

The door is cracked open to the limits of a security chain. Sheila's voice is a hoarse whisper. She looks out at the hallway doors nervously.

SHEILA

I told my brother I didn't want to talk to you.

Wallace responds in an inappropriately loud voice that panics Sheila.

WALLACE

--We have to talk to you. You have important information...
(even louder)
...about an extremely serious crime.

A door down the hall opens a crack and a woman looks out.

SHEILA

Shhhh!!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

She closes the door, releases the chain and reopens it.
Wallace and Beth enter.

INT. SHEILA JOHNSON'S APARTMENT - DAY

A small, but comfortably furnished, living room. Wallace puts the mug shots of Bradford and Washington down on a coffee table.

WALLACE
You still one hundred per cent positive?

SHEILA
Absolutely. Those were the two men who robbed the restaurants I was in.

Wallace's persona shifts again. He's deadly serious. A prosecutor going after a witness; leaving her no room.

WALLACE
You know these two men will cease to exist in ten days?

(silence)
You read my column. The eyewitnesses outside the murder scene could not possibly have been positive.

SHEILA
They said they were.

WALLACE
Not physically possible.

SHEILA
You have no idea how terrifying...
(swallowing hard)
Them screaming at people to get down on the floor.

WALLACE
And for that they deserve to die?

A long beat of silence. Wallace becomes less confrontational, more conversational.

WALLACE
Where's your brother now?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

SHEILA
At the hospital, I guess.

WALLACE
Not Lewis. Tyrell.

SHEILA
(shocked)
Tyrell? I have no idea. I haven't
seen him in years.

WALLACE
Four?

SHEILA
(looking away)
I don't think he's even in New York.
Maybe California.

WALLACE
(pointing at mug
shots; suspicious)
We killing the right people here?
(silence)
I'm not going to let this disappear.
If you know anything, tell me now,
Sheila.

A beat of silence. She won't make eye contact. She pushes
the mug shots back to him with her finger.

SHEILA
Those were the two who robbed the
restaurants I was in.

INT. 27TH PRECINCT - DAY

Wallace and Beth are at Postel's desk. The cop is looking
at Wallace with a mixture of frustration and annoyance.

POSTEL
Tyrell Johnson. Why not Bill Smith?
Or John Jones?

WALLACE
We can narrow it down.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

POSTEL
Let me guess...he's African-American.

WALLACE
See? You're batting a thousand.

POSTEL
What's a girl like you doing with a
guy like him?

BETH
(deadpan)
Love of learning?

WALLACE
DOB should be around '70.
Postel turns to his computer. Taps in the information and
starts reading the screen.

POSTEL
Manhattan, too old. Manhattan, too
young. Queens, dead. Brooklyn, could
he have been born in '68?

WALLACE
I don't have a birth date.
(looking at screen)
Bingo.

POSTEL
You sure?

WALLACE
Address is a match...there a mug shot?

POSTEL
(hits some keys)
Damn.

We can only see Wallace, Beth and Postel. Their faces
register shock. Wallace pulls the pictures of Bradford and
Washington out of his jacket. We now see what they're
reacting to. Bradford, shaved head, mustache, goatee stares
up from Postel's desk. We move up to the monitor and what
looks like the identical picture, but it's of Tyrell Johnson
-- shaved head, mustache, goatee.

WALLACE
Separated at birth...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN

INT. WALLACE'S APARTMENT - DAY

TILT UP to find Wallace pacing the balcony from one end to the other. He's wearing rumpled chinos and a Polo Shirt with a huge hole where the alligator used to be, and dragging a 1970's black desk phone with one hand, the receiver under his chin.

WALLACE

Yes I'm still holding? Not patiently, not happily, but yes, Ronald, I'm still here. Waiting fifteen minutes for you to check on a Town Car.

(beat)

Oyster Bay. On Long Island. Okay, you're not Ronald. I just need a car...Yes, I realize there's a Rolling Stones concert tonight. Three other car services -- plus Ronald -- pointed that out. Although last I heard, there were only five Stones, so how they could tie up every car in the city is --

As he wheels and throws the phone down onto a dog- and bourbon-soiled sofa. The phone bounces once off the sofa, then skids across the inlaid hardwood floor. Wallace peers over the balcony, rubs his neck, then pads barefoot down the stairs while looking up a number in a leather address book. He retrieves the phone, dials, then pushes an enormous stack of newspapers onto the floor, and flops down.

WALLACE

Beth? Hellooo, it's me. Fine, couldn't be better. Yeah, a humungous favor...a ride...to a wedding. No, not work. Not pleasure, either, but -- it is social...

(beat)

I'm not anti-social at all. I just hate everybody. Except you. Half an hour? Excellent.

As he hangs up.

INT. WALLACE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Shit on top of shit, resting on towers of stacked books. Wallace's pretzeled-up into a cufflink routine as the house phone rings. He knocks the phone off the cradle; refusing to give up the headway he's made with the cufflink, he bends down and talks into it.

WALLACE

Yes, Hector...

(a face)

All right, send him up.

He glares at the house phone, then at his cuff; sighing, he lets go of the cuff to hang up, then heads out onto the balcony and down the stairs, tie undone around his neck, still wrestling with the cufflink. He opens the door; it's Fresco.

WALLACE

You know, people don't just drop by enough anymore. Everybody's gotta check their schedules and make a play date a month in advance.

FRESCO

I was in the neighborhood... French cuffs? You?

He takes his friend's shirt sleeve and deftly finishes the cufflink nightmare. As Wallace goes to the liquor cabinet:

FRESCO

Guess who dropped in on me today?

WALLACE

Mick Jagger?

He starts shaking and peering into bottles -- they're all empty.

FRESCO

Detective Postel. He had some Sing-Sing All-Star cards to show me.

WALLACE

Good. You going to trade three Bradford and Washingtons for one Tyrell Johnson?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

FRESCO

I don't think so.

WALLACE

You've got to admit, it's pretty amazing.

FRESCO

What's amazing is how a guy who makes a hundred grand a year 'shining a light into the darkest recesses of the human heart' -- am I quoting the Pulitzer committee accurately? -- is such a lousy judge of character.

WALLACE

I never claimed to be much of a judge of character.

FRESCO

Look at all your ex-wives.

WALLACE

Look at my closest friends.

(beat)

If a homicide detective can have a change of heart, why can't you, assuming you still have one?

FRESCO

Postel hasn't had a change of anything. He only brought the mug shots by so I'd know what you're up to.

WALLACE

(genuinely stung)

Any time you want to know what I'm up to, Walter, pick up the phone and ask. Or spend four bits for a Ledger and read all about it. No, better yet -- just drop by.

He throws a bunch of empties into a leather wastebasket, which tips over.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

FRESCO

You're the only person I know who's got the whole screwball comedy cocktail set-up -- corkscrews, sterling silver spouts on all the bottles, crystal highball glasses -- but who never has a drop to drink.

WALLACE

Oh, I have a drop, all right -- that's why they're always empty.

He uses a Federal-period gilt mirror to knot his tie.

WALLACE

You've got to admit, there's a striking resemblance.

FRESCO

Between you and an insane person?

WALLACE

Between Johnson and Bradford.

FRESCO

You're just trying to goad me into saying they all look alike, and you know better than that.

WALLACE

After Chicago, you won't even entertain the notion of reasonable doubt?

Now Fresco's getting a little steamed.

FRESCO

Reasonable doubt is for the jury, Wallace -- I'm not a hundred per cent certain, I don't prosecute. And I sure as hell don't go for the death -- penalty.

The house phone rings again. Wallace grabs it up.

WALLACE

(barking)

Now what. Oh, okay, tell her I'll be right down. Thanks.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

He hangs up and jerks his thumb at the door.

WALLACE

I'm late for a wedding.

FRESCO

Really? You invited me to your other three.

They head out.

CUT TO

EXT. HOTEL DES ARTISTES - DAY

Wallace hurries out and down the block with Fresco.

FRESCO

You want a human interest story?
Write about the homeless teenager with
the crack-pipe Mom who just got a
football scholarship to Penn State.
Why waste ink on these two altar boys?

WALLACE

(dogged)

Because I'm not sure they did it
anymore.

He turns the corner onto the side street and heads for Beth
and her Beamer -- she's leaning against the passenger's
side, reading a paper. Stunning.

FRESCO

You're delusional.

Fresco skids to a halt when he sees Beth.

FRESCO

Who's this?

WALLACE

Beth Lowell, shining light of Columbia
J-School. Walter Fresco. Fairweather
friend.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

FRESCO

(to Beth)

He takes everything so personally.

BETH

(frankly admiring)

Yes, he does.

She gives him a radiant smile, folds the paper and opens the door for Wallace. Then goes around to the driver's side. Wallace watches Fresco watching her smashing ass.

FRESCO

Is this a dry run for number four?

WALLACE

It's strictly professional.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

An estate with lawns and mossy Canova knock-offs among the weeping cherries. A boxwood maze would be nice, for the mystery -- Grey Gardens after the restoration. Wallace, already a bit wobbly, waves his empty old-fashioned glass at a passing waiter.

WALLACE

How we doing there?

The waiter, a really good-looking young black actor-model-whatever with diamond studs, turns with a tray full of champagne flutes.

WAITER

The bartender's working on it.

(slight beat)

Sir.

WALLACE

(slightly belligerent)

-- There's no work involved -- glass, ice, Bushmills -- pour. Then pour again.

WAITER

Would you care for some champagne while you're waiting...it's D.P.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

I don't care if it's Cold Duck.
 (showing cuffs)
 See these? French cuffs. I got
 carpal tunnel wrestling with these
 bastards, so I don't want anything
 else French today, thank you very
 much.

The waiter shrugs, moves on, as the younger of the two women
 looks over and smiles. It's Brooke, ex-wife number one,
 with his mother.

BROOKE

You used to be rather adroit at
 certain French exercises, darling.

MRS. BENTON

Even as a little boy, he was gifted in
 language.

Wallace rolls his eyes.

WALLACE

What are you two conspiring about?

BROOKE

(ignoring him)
 A definite way with words --
 (quoting him)
 C'est fou, c'est fou, mon petite chou.

WALLACE

(dry)
 That was before I lost my joie de
 vivre.

As Beth appears.

BETH

Oh, there you are. I thought you'd
 ditched me for some slutty little
 Foxcroft alum named Muffy or Teensy or
 whatever --

She stops, feeling the eyes of the two women upon her: oops.

WALLACE

Mother, Beth Lowell.

MRS. BENTON

Ah, the new protégé. Hello, dear.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

BETH

It's very nice to meet you.

MRS. BENTON

And this is Brooke Benton...

BROOKE

We've met. I'm the first Mrs. Benton. Not a former protégé, but, as it happens, a former Foxcroft slut.

WALLACE

(desperate)

Beth and the others are helping me on the Big Mac murder story...

BROOKE

(to Beth)

Let me guess -- you're doing all the legwork while he does all the agonized hand-wringing.

BETH

Actually, we're all part of a team.

BROOKE

I'm sure you are, Betsy.

Wallace's mother takes Beth's elbow and steers her toward the buffet.

MRS. BENTON

I think we're all getting a little hypoglycemic, don't you, dear?

Wallace and Brooke watch the two women walking together.

BROOKE

God, she's got a great ass.

Wallace holds an ice cube against his throbbing temple, then flees for the safety of the bar. He stiff-arms his empty glass toward the bartender.

WALLACE

Bushmills -- and don't stop till I say when.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

While the bartender pours, the black waiter comes up with a tray of empty glasses.

WAITER

Oh -- I see you're cool.

Wallace drains the full glass of whiskey, whistles, then:

WALLACE

Oh, yeah -- I'm cool.

(beat)

So what's with the 'tude, bro?

The guy sets out a tray of clean glasses, starts to fill them.

WAITER

Read your column. Four years ago, you set yourself up as Bradford and Washington's executioner, now you want to be their savior.

WALLACE

And?

The guy keeps his eyes on the champagne glasses.

WAITER

And it's typical, that's all. Like, without the white man, there's no justice. Like they need you to vouch for their innocence -- maybe if they get out, you can co-sign the papers for their welfare cheese, too.

He takes his tray and heads into the crowd with his professional actor/waiter's smile. Wallace watches him, then holds his glass out for a refill, the comment preying on his mind. He drains it, then weaves over to the buffet table. We see him join Beth and his mother, see him nonchalantly lean against the table, see him put out a hand to steady-himself. It's all kind of slow motion and inevitable, as he grasps the ice swan, slips, slides, and goes down in a rain of boiled shrimp.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Wallace woodenly returns various reporters' good mornings -- he's got the stiff walk of the badly hung over. He stops at the coffee table, pours a paper cup, then takes a bottle of aspirin from his jacket pocket and bites off the cap.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Shakes out three or four and swallows them with his coffee as a man in a windbreaker comes up behind him.

WINDBREAKER

Mr. Benton?

Wallace turns, squints as the man hands him an envelope.

WINDBREAKER

Thank you, and have a nice day.

Wallace stares at the envelope for a moment, blinking in pained incomprehension. Then he gets it.

WALLACE

(bellowing)

Sean! Where the hell is Sean?

Sean appears instantly, pushing his copy boy cart piled high with the latest edition.

SEAN

Right here.

WALLACE

Where the hell is security? Some pencil-neck process server just waltzed in and handed me a subpoena like it was a corned beef on rye.

Arleen Masucci sails out of her glass cubicle.

ARLEEN

What did you expect?

WALLACE

A little protection.

She whips out her own subpoena.

ARLEEN

I got served, too, Wallace. And
-Bradford and Washington's lawyers want
-- forthwith --

(reading)

-- all notes, memoranda, phone
messages and logs, and communications
written or electronically conveyed
between writer --

(looking up)

That's you. And editor, that's me.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

She folds the paper and waits for his reply. He shrugs.

WALLACE

They want my notes, they'll have to do a lobotomy, because it's all up here.

(taps his forehead;
wincing)

Who's handling the appeal?

ARLEEN

Stewart Williams of the Capital Punishment Defense League.

CUT TO

INT. DEFENSE LEAGUE - DAY

Wallace scans the framed awards and diplomas on the wall of Stewart Williams's office. Williams, mid-thirties, well-dressed and polished, watches him.

WALLACE

Why the subpoena?

WILLIAMS

Because you know they're innocent.

WALLACE

Come on, man -- Bradford? First arrest at nine. Second at nine and a half. Beat the crap out of a blind man and stole his groceries at eleven. Not an innocent.

WILLIAMS

Fine. They're not guilty.

WALLACE

No -- no, see, they've already been found guilty. You're supposed to show -- me evidence of this famous innocence.

Williams walks over and straightens one of the framed awards Wallace'd tilted. He's being thoughtful, or canny. Finally:

WILLIAMS

Forget about Bradford -- let's talk about Washington. Ever seen the guy?

WALLACE

Only handcuffed to the defense table.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WILLIAMS

Then you know those aren't the hands
of a killer.

Wallace stares at him, incredulous.

WALLACE

You're putting me on, right?

WILLIAMS

This is a guy with zero history of
violent crime.

WALLACE

Other than armed robbery, which seems
like the very definition of violent
crime.

WILLIAMS

Read his rap sheet -- never used a
gun. Never used a knife - not even
his fists.

WALLACE

Yeah, I'm sure his mom always told
him, 'Use your words, Willie.'

WILLIAMS

Words can do a lot of damage, as you
very well know.

Wallace sighs loudly and rubs his face.

WILLIAMS

Forget your notes and electronic
communications, Mr. Benton -- that was
all just pro forma boilerplate. Go
and talk to the man yourself, before
time runs out.

Off Wallace, shoulders sagging in acquiescence.

INT. PRISON VISITOR'S ROOM - DAY

Wallace at a table with Willie Washington, who projects a
serene amiability, like a black Buddha. His hands are
folded quietly in front of him; Wallace stares at them.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WASHINGTON

(mild)
My fingernails dirty or something?

WALLACE

(busted)
No, I was just...you ever beat anyone up?

WASHINGTON

Why, just because you called me and Bradford 'mad dogs that need to be put to sleep?' Don't worry, man, the guards'd be all over my ass before I landed the first punch.

WALLACE

Did you?

WASHINGTON

(sheepish)
No. I played the part okay, but why you think I had to shoot skag all those years? Because I'm a wuss is why. I couldn't punch my way out of a nickel bag.

Wallace now studies the man's face, which seems to shine.

WALLACE

You don't look like a junkie to me.

WASHINGTON

Once one, always one. But I got with the program here, been clean three years, seven months and two days.

WALLACE

(means it)
Congratulations.

WASHINGTON

- Yeah. Kinda ironic. Out there, I tried to kill myself on a daily basis, and in here, I get a new lease on life, only...

He shrugs. Off Wallace's face, stricken, as we hear:

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

BRADFORD (O.S.)

Willie's straight up, man -- I had to pull him away one time from some guy I jacked off -- he was all apologetic; wanted to know if the dude was okay...

INT. PRISON VISITOR'S ROOM - DAY

Rico Bradford, who looks mean enough to bite off Tyson's ear, stares at Wallace.

WALLACE

(cautiously)

Everybody in here's innocent -- what makes you two any different?

BRADFORD

Because we are. Damn legal aid shyster conned me into playing the odds -- she said no way could that bitch witness pick us out.

WALLACE

She didn't pick Washington -- only you.

BRADFORD

That's what I'm talking about -- Willie never hurt nobody. But what was I gonna do -- my alibi woulda fried my ass anyhow.

WALLACE

What do you mean.

BRADFORD

What do I mean?

He laughs, leans forward across the table. His voice drops to a low, conspiratorial growl.

BRADFORD

What I mean is, I couldn'ta been killing nobody in no Upper East Side Mickey D's, reason bein' I was in Williamsburg at the time, cappin' two other fools.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

You're innocent, because you were off
killing somebody else the night of the
murder.

BRADFORD

That's what I'm telling you.

(shrugging)

You want Nothin' But The Truth?
That's it. Word up.

Off Wallace.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

EXT. TENEMENT ROOF - DAY

Wallace and his J-schoolgirls pour out of the stairwell and onto the roof -- they look up at the sky, around at the view: they're nervous and exhilarated.

BETH

What caliber are we looking for?

WALLACE

You mean, in case we find other guns stashed up here?

(off her shrug)

A .45 automatic.

FUNG

And you believe him?

WALLACE

That's why we're here, isn't it?

PRESLEY

I thought we were here to check out the facts, you know -- the five W's and all that.

WALLACE

Objective journalism's a myth, ladies. You should know that by now.

All the while, he's looking around the roofline of the stairwell housing.

BETH

Did he narrow it down for you?

WALLACE

-Uh-huh.

FOSTER

(sarcastic)

Four years later, there's a gun just lying on the roof.

WALLACE

Did I say on the roof, Foster?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

With a Bat Masterson move, Wallace whips out his arm, and a tire iron slides out his sleeve and into his hand. He quickly pries up one corner of the sheet metal roof, then another until the iron hits steel.

WALLACE

(to Beth)

Hanky?

She fishes in her handbag, and comes out with a Kleenex. He hesitates.

BETH

It's clean.

As he takes it from her:

BETH

Relatively.

He gingerly wraps the Kleenex in his hand, then fishes around under the roof until he comes up with a weapon. Which he triumphantly waves at the doubting Fung.

WALLACE

What's this look like?

FUNG

A .45 automatic.

WALLACE

A possible air-tight alibi for Bradford. But don't jump to any conclusions, Ms. Fung.

He turns to Beth, who opens her handbag -- he drops the gun in as the others notice their close -- too close? -- familiarity.

INT. BALLISTICS LAB - DAY

BANG and then the lab tech reaches in and retrieves the slug. Wallace turns to Postel, who's holding a murder file and some evidence bags.

WALLACE

Those the slugs from the two drug dealers in Williamsburg?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

POSTEL
(nodding)
That's what you asked for, isn't it?

WALLACE
(tense, excited)
Just double-checking. And you'll
notice the date on the jacket...

POSTEL
(nodding)
Same as the Big Mac massacre. And you
want to see if the slugs match, I got
that.

He hands the bag to the tech, who removes a slug and puts it
under a microscope next to the one just fired.

POSTEL
But who? And why?

TECH
(looking up)
Absolute one hundred per cent perfect
on the money.

Wallace pumps his fist.

WALLACE
Who? Bradford. Why's a little more
complicated.

POSTEL
And I'm a simple man -- maybe if you
explain it phonetically.

WALLACE
Bradford gave up the gun when I
visited him in Sing-Sing.

POSTEL
- I hope you brought him a nice bundt
cake.

WALLACE
Said he'd stashed it on a rooftop on
138th and Lex.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

POSTEL

(slow grin)

After zipping the two crackheads under the Williamsburg Bridge. And that's his alibi for the McDonald's thing?

He laughs, really enjoying this.

POSTEL

See? I told you the man was born to be hanged.

WALLACE

But I can't let that happen to Washington -- he didn't have anything to do with any of those killings.

POSTEL

(not laughing)

Yeah, well, he should've chosen his companions better, because unless you get the real killers to write it all down for you, Willie's gonna go down with his homey just the same.

Off Wallace, frowning.

INT. FRESCO'S OFFICE - DAY

Wallace, seething, paces the office while Fresco leans back, feet up on his desk.

WALLACE

This is ridiculous.

FRESCO

What do you want me to say, Wallace?

WALLACE

That Postel's wrong.

FRESCO

Okay -- Postel's wrong.

He swings his feet down, takes a cigar or something and fiddles with it while Wallace burns.

FRESCO

I don't need a written confession from the real killers -- an oral one will do.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

I don't believe this -- what about the gun?

FRESCO

What about it? Washington and Bradford weren't picked up until ten days after the massacre -- they had plenty of time to buy as many guns as they wanted. Including one with bodies on it.

WALLACE

Walter -- you know this clears them. And you're just going to let it happen?

FRESCO

(pissed)

Hey, you're the one who opened the old wound, rubbed salt in it, and now you're bitching that the poor innocent victims are in pain. Find me some compelling evidence, and I'll go to the grand jury. Otherwise, sayonara, suckers.

(beat)

And by compelling, I mean the real killers, whose identities are still, regrettably, unknown.

Wallace stops pacing, snaps his fingers.

WALLACE

To us. But I know someone who knows.

As he splits.

INT. SHEILA JOHNSON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Wallace's already warmed up -- he's into his delivery as Sheila, eyes averted, stares a hole in the shag carpet.

WALLACE

You knew your brother Tyrell had it scoped out about Sunday night -- maybe he got that from you, some innocent remark about Friday night, Saturday, all of Sunday's take just sitting there waiting for the bank to open on Monday morning, right?

(MORE)

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE (CONT'D)

It was just shop talk, you never imagined he'd act on it -- your own brother.

He starts rocking back and forth -- her silence is eloquently affirmative. He's jazzed -- keeps rolling.

WALLACE

Besides, you're a smart woman, you're trying to get ahead -- the Upper east side, maybe there's a managerial gig for you at Micky D's Interplanetary HQ, right, Sheila? So what -- he says call in sick, you're scared of him, you hope for the best --

SHEILA

I told him nobody gets hurt!
(in pain)
I never never never...

She's choking. He lowers his voice, comes in close and soothing; a confessor.

WALLACE

Tell me where he is, no one else will get hurt, Sheila.

She shakes her head no, hugs herself...

WALLACE

Yes. So many people have died. Did you know one of the women Tyrell shot had two little babies at home? You think they'll ever have a really Happy Meal again? Or the witness in Chicago -- she's pregnant with her first child, but her husband -- the manager, working hard on Sunday night, just like you -- he'd be home watching -- football and eating real food for a change -- now there's another fatherless child.

SHEILA

All right! All right! Stop.
(heartbroken)
Just stop, okay?

CUT TO

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Wallace's squeezed between a tired mid-manager with a laptop and a large woman with a Grant Woods farmwife face. He's yelling into the airphone to make himself heard.

WALLACE

Well, you better tell them to make sure, Walter, because these are some very bad-ass guys.

The businessman looks up from his laptop, gives him a sideways glance, goes back to playing solitaire.

WALLACE

Fine -- it's their necks. If it were my takedown, I'd go in with Uzis and hand grenades, but that's just me.

He listens, blocking one ear in annoyance as the farm lady reaches over him and hits the call button.

WALLACE

(listening)

Uh-huh. Uh-huh, right.

While he listens, a flight attendant comes over and bends down to the farm lady in the aisle seat, who whispers to her, then jerks her thumb at Wallace.

ATTENDANT

(leaning over)

Sir? Sir?

WALLACE

(covering; annoyed)

What? ..

ATTENDANT

Is there a problem, sir?

WALLACE

Other than this interruption is costing me about eight dollars of exorbitant airtime, no -- none that I know of.

The attendant looks at the woman, who's sitting tight-lipped. Then:

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

FARM LADY
Guns and grenades.

She jabs her finger at Wallace.

ATTENDANT
You know, sir, that it's a federal
crime to carry a weapon on a plane, or
even to verbally joke --

WALLACE
(into phone)
Walter? Talk to Amelia Earhart for a
second, will you?

He hands the phone to the attendant.

ATTENDANT
Hello?

She listens, obviously getting an earful from Fresco, then
respectfully hands the phone back to Wallace.

ATTENDANT
The district attorney had to go, but
he wants to make sure you 'have a
picture of your boy.'

Wallace hangs up the phone, reaches into his coat pocket and
flashes the doctored mug shot of Tyrell Jefferson with the
cornrows and beard.

BUSINESSMAN
Whoa!

INT. CHICAGO P.D. - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

LOUISE (V.O.)
That's him.

We pull back from the same picture on a scarred wooden table
top. A detective faces her, Wallace next to him.

DETECTIVE
You sure?

LOUISE
Oh, yeah.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

How far away were you?

LOUISE

Right across the street...maybe forty feet.

Wallace leans back, vindicated.

EXT. CHICAGO TENEMENT - DAY

Wallace stands behind a full SWAT unit. The lieutenant is talking to a uniformed deputy chief.

CHIEF

They're both in there?

LIEUTENANT

Yes, sir. Positive I.D. from the neighbors.

WALLACE

I want to go in with them.

CHIEF

Very funny.

WALLACE

Chief -- you wouldn't be here without me. I want to go in.

CHIEF

You want to get killed? Be my guest. But wear a helmet.

INT. CHICAGO TENEMENT - DAY

The SWAT team hugs the stairwell wall as they race upwards, Wallace, huffing and puffing, looking ludicrous as he brings up the rear, sweating inside the large black helmet. They surround a door, the lieutenant working with hand signals, and smash in. Tyrell and Delroy are cleaning their guns as they watch TV. The SWAT team starts screaming.

SWAT

Freeze!...You move you die...etc.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Wallace enters. Two Chicago detectives pace around a seated shackled Tyrell, who looks monumentally bored.

DETECTIVE #1

We've informed Mr. Johnson that he's been positively I.D.'d by the fiancée of one of his victims and that we'll have a ballistics report on his gun within an hour.

DETECTIVE #2

We also told this sack of crap that we've requested ballistics reports on three other Sunday night massacres.

TYRELL

Yeah. And then they're going to execute me four times.

WALLACE

Can I talk to him alone?

DETECTIVE #1

Knock yourself out.

Wallace watches the door close behind the cops and then turns to Tyrell.

WALLACE

You know who I am?

TYRELL

Uh-huh.

WALLACE

They can only kill you once, but they can kill Sheila, too.

A jolt of electricity. Tyrell tries to come out of his chair, but the shackles hold him in place.

WALLACE

Let me tell you what went down, Tyrell. She told you how much Bradford and Washington had made on the other robberies. She said it would be a piece of cake.

TYRELL

She had nothing to do with it.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE

Sure she did. She told you when to come in. Even what to order. Don't touch anything. Just eat the fries.

TYRELL

No...

WALLACE

Then she told you not to leave any witnesses.

TYRELL

That's jive. None of that happened. It's not true.

Wallace puts both hands on the table and leans forward into Tyrell's face, his voice a hiss, his eyes cold.

WALLACE

It is if that's the way I write it.

TYRELL

You bastard mother...

WALLACE

(cutting him off)
You got that right...bro.

EXT. SING-SING PRISON - DAY

Wallace, Beth, and the other students watch as Bradford and Washington, free men, walk out into the sunshine as a cadre of press record the moment. The murderer smiles, waves at the assembled press, then walks over to Wallace, who stiffens as Bradford embraces him and whispers into his ear, an edge of mockery in his voice as the cameras click.

BRADFORD

You did us a solid...bro.

He ducks-quickly into a '79 Caddy with tinted windows -- it roars away, leaving Washington alone. Wallace and Beth watch while he reluctantly let's himself be photographed, but won't get close to the reporters who shout questions -- "How does it feel?" "What are you going to do first?" etc.

WALLACE

Well, that's that.

BETH

Shouldn't we give him a ride?

Wallace looks at her, a little surprised, then admiringly.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

WALLACE
Hey, Washington.

Washington's equally surprised -- he walks over to them.

WASHINGTON
What're you doing here?

WALLACE
You know -- the happy ending...

WASHINGTON
Yeah.

BETH
Can we give you a ride into town?

WASHINGTON
(shaking head)
My sponsor's gonna carry me.

He looks at Wallace with that slightly amused, piercing quality of his.

WASHINGTON
Been thinking about something you said the other day.

WALLACE
Oh yeah? What?

WASHINGTON
(holding up hands)
About these hands -- never hitting anyone.

(beat)
Never had a reason to, till now.

Then bam! He punches Wallace once across the jaw, staggering him back against Beth, who holds him up. As Wallace rubs his chin:

BETH
What the hell was that for?

WASHINGTON
That was for me.
(to Wallace)
Remember that, next time you get the urge to crucify a man in your column.

As he spins on his heel, off Wallace. He clearly won't.

FADE OUT

THE END