

The following story takes place between
1:15 p.m. and 3:02 p.m. E.S.T.
November 22, 1963

OVER PRODUCTION LOGOS, A DEEP VOICE:

WALTER (V.O.)

Lou's crew can lunch at two. John
threw the bomb to Tom in Guam. Go
slow Joe, you've stepped on my toe.

DON HEWITT (V.O.)

Go fast, Walter, you're a pain in
the ass.

Laughter. Background chatter.

CAMERA ASSISTANT (V.O.)

And, on in five, four, three...

TELEVISION BROADCAST MONITOR:

Grainy, black and white. The face of WALTER CRONKITE (40s).

WALTER (ON TV)

President Kennedy opened a three-
day tour of Texas today where he is
expected to reassure state
representatives of his ambitious
space program despite congressional
budget reductions --

His face is kind. His voice, an almost preternatural calming
effect at a perfect 124-words-per-minute rate.

PULL AWAY from the screen to reveal a TV NEWS CONTROL ROOM.

Lights, low. ADJACENT MONITORS are either turned off or on
white noise. A JANITOR cleans up. There's no one working the
CONTROL CONSOLE, no one watching the NEWS FEED.

In the STUDIO, two HUGE CAMERAS idle, slumped down on their
stands like old men at naptime. The ANCHOR CHAIR behind the
newsdesk sits EMPTY. Studio lights, off. A GHOST ROOM.

We are not listening to a live broadcast.

WALTER (ON TV) (CONT'D)

-- the senior senator of that
state, Ralph Yarborough, refused to
accompany Vice President Johnson in
the motorcade today, underscoring
the bitter divide between the two
factions of the Democratic party.

EXT. CBS TELEVISION

1963. Lunch-time bustle of West 57th Street in New York City. But a LOUDER BUSTLE rises in volume, the clamor of --

INT. CBS NEWS DEPARTMENT - 1:15 P.M.

-- PHONES ringing from all directions, TYPISTS punching keys as EDITORS and PRODUCERS navigate the newsroom under a haze of cigarette smoke. We latch onto a stout man --

DON HEWITT (40s)

-- dark hair, short-sleeve shirt and tie, cigar clutched between his fingers like a conductor's baton --

DON HEWITT

-- Need 20 more seconds on that DeGaulle story.

NEWS EDITOR

I'll cable Paris and ask for 20 more seconds of news.

DON HEWITT

And a new job while you're at it.

SECRETARY

(approaching)

Mr. Hewitt -- Jim Aubrey asked to see you and Mr. Cronkite.

DON HEWITT

Find me Ed Bliss.

She heads off and Hewitt checks the TELETYPE MACHINES. No new "wires" coming through. He looks at a ream of recent news.

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)

Where the hell is Bliss?

NEWS EDITOR

I just saw him with Salant.

ED BLISS (O.S.)

Right here.

ED BLISS (30s) approaches with newspapers under his arm.

DON HEWITT

Where we at on the Teamsters story?

ED BLISS
Federal government's paying five
hundred grand for sewage disposal.

DON HEWITT
On top of the twenty million from
the pension fund?

ED BLISS
Going straight to the casinos.

DON HEWITT
What's the quid pro quo?

ED BLISS
I'm working it.

DON HEWITT
No, you're talking to me.

Bliss heads off.

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)
Somebody get me some goddamn news,
or am I gonna have to go out and
rob a bank in my underwear?

NEWS EDITOR
Is it Friday already?

A producer, MORT DANK (30s) passes by.

MORT
Aubrey wants you.

DON HEWITT
Yeah, yeah.
(to a passing secretary)
Hey, hon?

SECRETARY
Yes, Mr. Hewitt?

NEWS EDITOR
Mr. Hewitt needs a shotgun, darling.

From across the room --

ED BLISS
And some fresh underwear!

DON HEWITT
Where's Walter?

INT. WALTER'S OFFICE - 1:18 P.M.

WALTER CRONKITE (40s) sits in his office with FRANK KERNER (50s), an NYPD officer in full-dress uniform. Big brass in the Department. Cronkite, a button collar and tie.

OFFICER KERNER

I heard you don't like Catholics.

WALTER

I don't like anybody, Frank. That's my secret.

OFFICER KERNER

So what accounts for your little spat with the president?

Don Hewitt knocks and walks in. The bustle from the newsroom, audible again.

WALTER

The president and I are on excellent terms.

Kerner throws Walter a knowing look.

WALTER (CONT'D)

We've got newspapers, radio, the other television networks -- a lot of competition out there. Sometimes we need to be aggressive if we want to get the story.

DON HEWITT

Nothing the president's not used to.

OFFICER KERNER

Well, this should help ease your burden.

Kerner tosses a FILE on Walter's desk. Walter picks it up, thumbs through the pages, curious...

WALTER

What is this?

OFFICER KERNER

What's it look like?

WALTER

It looks like tabloid fodder.

(reading)

The governor of New York covering up his son's death...

OFFICER KERNER
Hell of a story right there.

Hewitt, skeptical too.

DON HEWITT
Where'd you get it?

OFFICER KERNER
Mayor's office put together an
investigative unit.

WALTER
If I recall, Rockefeller's son
disappeared on a trip to New
Guinea. Is New Guinea the sixth
borough now, Frank?

OFFICER KERNER
It was a courtesy to the governor
in a time of personal need.

WALTER
Well it feels more like a mayor with
state-wide ambitions trying to smear
his governor and open a spot for a
run at Albany.

Kerner, a smug smile.

DON HEWITT
Who else did you give it to?

OFFICER KERNER
Just you boys. Exclusive.

Walter and Hewitt exchange a look. Walter indicates a framed
NEWSPAPER ARTICLE hanging on the wall:

WALTER
Look at that...
(Kerner looks)
My first byline. Houston Post. I was
16 years old. And even that kid there
knew better than to print something
with no sources, no corroboration,
and no verified facts.
(tosses the file down)
We can't run this.

OFFICER KERNER
"Get me stories." That's what you
said to me two months ago when you
were gettin' started.

(MORE)

OFFICER KERNER (CONT'D)
"The other networks are beating our asses, Frank, and I need stories."

WALTER
Yeah, NEWS stories. Not some self-serving gossip the mayor overheard at the Yale Club. Come on.

OFFICER KERNER
Fine.

Kerner stands up and dons his police cap.

OFFICER KERNER (CONT'D)
NBC's 10 blocks away. And a hell of a lot more people'll see it there. Have a good day, boys.

He walks out. Cronkite and Hewitt look at each other. Walter tosses the file in the trash with a violent THUMP.

WALTER
You see that Times piece? Two papers shut down in Saigon.

DON HEWITT
We're running it down. I think we should lead with the Teamsters.

WALTER
I hope Ed got something.

DON HEWITT
He's working it.

Hewitt re-lights his cigar. Walter puts on his reading glasses and surveys his desk. Teletype stories assembled like a jigsaw puzzle in progress.

WALTER
I've got, what's his name, Dan driving to Dallas for that Yarborough story.

DON HEWITT
Old news, Walter.

WALTER
Better than no news.

DON HEWITT
We need to think about this Rockefeller thing.

WALTER

NBC won't run it. Nobody with an ounce of journalistic integrity would touch that story with a 10-foot pole. Exclusive, my ass.

DON HEWITT

We've gotta give Aubrey something.

WALTER

When are we giving Aubrey anything?

DON HEWITT

Now.

Walter looks at him. Shit.

INT. CBS NEWS CORRIDORS - 1:21 P.M.

They walk down a hallway past scurrying journalists and producers and step into a waiting elevator.

WALTER

Seen the overnights?

DON HEWITT

Not yet.

Doors close.

WALTER

Yeah, you did.

DON HEWITT

Worry about the news. I'll worry about the ratings.

WALTER

Just want to know how big a bite he's gonna take out of my ass, Don.

DON HEWITT

If you had any left, it'd be a big one.

DING.

WALTER

Into the lion's den.

The elevator doors open.

INT. TOP FLOOR, CBS

A SECRETARY'S DESK stands sentry before a silver CBS EYE logo on the wall. A very different energy up here. Not a news person to be seen. This is corporate.

That opening telecast of Walter's voice is now audible again:

WALTER (FROM TV)

-- In Leopoldville, the Republic of Congo has ousted all Soviet aides and suspended ties to Moscow --

AUBREY'S SECRETARY

He's expecting you.

WALTER

(passing her)

Thank you.

INT. JIM AUBREY'S OFFICE

A luxurious office. The president of the network.

Walter's broadcast, louder now. It's a REPLAY of last night's news. This is the voiceover we've been hearing. It's being fed up here from the empty control room downstairs.

WALTER (ON TV)

-- still asserting that diplomats had sought to undermine his regime.

Posters of the network's big hits don the office walls: Beverly Hillbillies, My Favorite Martian, Andy Griffith, Perry Mason, Lassie, Rawhide, Gunsmoke, and on and on and on.

Walter and Don approach a MAN on a tufted leather couch watching Walter's replay, drink in hand.

WALTER (ON TV) (CONT'D)

That's the way it is, November 21st, 1963. I'm Walter Cronkite. Goodnight.

The feed cuts to a static CBS EYE.

The man watching is JIM AUBREY (50s).

JIM AUBREY

Drink, gentlemen?

WALTER

Are we going to need one?

JIM AUBREY

Not if you can tell me why
Americans would rather watch you
talk about Nigeria than look at
Ginger's tits on Gilligan's Island.

DON HEWITT

Whose island?

JIM AUBREY

Shooting the pilot now --

He indicates some casting photos on his desk.

JIM AUBREY (CONT'D)

-- desert island, coconut bikinis.
Ginger, Marianne: tall, thin and
tan. Gonna be huge.

WALTER

Sounds wonderful.

JIM AUBREY

Advertisers are giving us a million
dollars a night for programs like
that. Any idea how much your
department brings in?

DON HEWITT

We just jumped from 15 minutes to
30. Gotta give people time to get
used to the new broadcast.

JIM AUBREY

It's been 10 weeks.

WALTER

Exactly.

JIM AUBREY

Did you go out with a lot of girls
before you met your wife, Walter?

DON HEWITT

I sense a morality tale coming.

WALTER

(under his breath)
Immorality, more likely.

JIM AUBREY

Suppose you met one, smart as a
whip but not very good looking.
There's something about her though.

(MORE)

JIM AUBREY (CONT'D)
Can't deny it. She talks about current events and politics and that's all great, but she doesn't open her goddamn legs.

WALTER
Please, Jim.

JIM AUBREY
You give her a little time to warm up, yeah? But if she doesn't get you off after 10 weeks, you cut her loose.

WALTER
People will watch the news.

JIM AUBREY
But they're not watching it. See my problem? We've got 14 of the top 15 shows in prime time. Double the revenue from when I took over this place. I shudder to think what we'd be making without your ugly mug on every 6:30.

WALTER
No one thought radio would catch on. Then Ed Murrow came along.

JIM AUBREY
Murrow would've tanked too if he went up against the Flintstones.

Aubrey downs his drink. Pours another.

JIM AUBREY (CONT'D)
Guess who called me up this morning? Mayor Wagner. Told me about a juicy story he slipped you about Rockefeller's kid getting eaten by cannibals or some shit.

WALTER
I hope he told you it's fiction.

JIM AUBREY
This is television, Walter. What the hell do you think we do here? You can't have it both ways, you know. Can't be a journalist *and* a star. At some point, you're gonna have to make a choice.

Walter, starting to get frustrated.

DON HEWITT

We're chasing a story on the Teamsters -- diverting pension money into Vegas casinos.

JIM AUBREY

And?

WALTER

It's coming together.

Aubrey chuckles, puts on his jacket.

JIM AUBREY

Okay, brass tacks, gentlemen. You lead with a big-fat, big-titted story every goddamn night of the week. Teamsters Monday, the Rockefeller kid tonight.

WALTER

Give us a little time--

JIM AUBREY

TONIGHT.

Aubrey heads for the door.

JIM AUBREY (CONT'D)

If I don't see cannibals on my screen come 6:31 P.M., you're out on your ass at 6:32. Both of you.

He walks out. Walter and Hewitt look at each other.

WALTER

I could use that drink now.

EXT. DALLAS, TEXAS

Throngs of PEOPLE -- cowboy hats, Texas accents -- cheering and shouting as they hurry toward Dealey Plaza.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY, DALLAS

A scrappy YOUNG REPORTER follows Houston congressman AL THOMAS down a hotel hallway with a pad and pencil.

YOUNG REPORTER

Has the Senator spoken to the Vice President since yesterday?

AL THOMAS

No --

YOUNG REPORTER

Will he reach out today?

AL THOMAS

-- You didn't let me finish my sentence. The second word was going to be "comment."

YOUNG REPORTER

A Democratic Senator from Texas refusing to ride in a limousine with the Democratic Vice President from Texas with an election less than a year away is a story.

AL THOMAS

You know what else is a story? Russian farmers starving. Civil Rights. Communist infiltration of the State Department. Castro. Algerian revolution. The space race. World hunger. And you're hounding me about a damned car ride?

YOUNG REPORTER

A car ride between two men who could shape the legislative agenda for the next five years, pass Civil Rights law, confront Castro, fund NASA, send aid to Algeria and spearhead a coalition to fight world hunger? Yeah, I am.

AL THOMAS

You forgot commies in State.

YOUNG REPORTER

No, because there aren't any.

AL THOMAS

Probably not, but it scares the shit out of voters, kid.

YOUNG REPORTER

I just drove 250 miles to get this story.

AL THOMAS
Well then you're an idiot.

YOUNG REPORTER
I gotta give my boss something.
Come on, congressman. Take pity.

Thomas slows, regards the scrappy reporter.

AL THOMAS
After the motorcade the President's
giving a speech at the Trade Mart.
I'll get you a pass, you can ask
one question... What's your name?

YOUNG REPORTER
Dan Rather.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, DALLAS

A phone rings. LEW WOOD (50s), a southern reporter, picks up.

LEW WOOD
Yeah.

INT. WALTER'S OFFICE - 1:27 P.M.

Walter and Don on speakerphone in New York on the other end.

DON HEWITT
We're pulling you guys.

LEW WOOD
What?

INT. HOTEL ROOM, DALLAS

DAN RATHER opens the door and walks into the room where Lew is getting ready with another reporter, BOB HUFFAKER (40s).

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

WALTER
We need hands on deck for the
Teamsters story in Vegas.

LEW WOOD
We just drove 250 miles.

DON HEWITT
Sorry, Lew.

Rather mouths to Lew Wood: "What's going on?"

LEW WOOD
We're packing up, kid.

Huffaker looks up, too. Surprised.

DAN RATHER
I got a pass to the Trade Mart.
They're giving me a question.

LEW WOOD
You hear that, Walter?

DON HEWITT
We heard. Now hit the road.

DAN RATHER
President's going to be there in
less than an hour. This is bullshit.

Hewitt overhears the kid, incredulous --

DON HEWITT
Excuse me?

-- but Walter is amused by Rather's moxie. A beat.

LEW WOOD
Walter... let the kid have his
question.

Walter considers...

WALTER
Wish I could, Lew. I'm sorry.

Walter hits the button to hang up.

In the hotel room, Lew Wood looks at young Rather:

LEW WOOD
Let's hit the road.

Rather is pissed. He walks out of the hotel room --

LEW WOOD (CONT'D)
Where the hell are you going??

EXT. HOTEL

Rather hurries through the parking lot to a car. He starts up the engine as Lew emerges from the hotel.

LEW WOOD
Get out of the damn car, kid!

Rather peels away. Lew, incredulous.

INT. WALTER'S OFFICE

Walter turns to see his secretary standing in the doorway.

WALTER
Hello, Margaret...

MARGARET (30s) looks shy, nervous. Hewitt gets the hint.

DON HEWITT
I'm gonna get a slice. Walt?

WALTER
Betsy packed a lunch.

DON HEWITT
Pineapple and cottage cheese is not
lunch. It's torture.

Hewitt heads out, shouts from beyond the door:

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)
I'll bring you a slice!

WALTER
What is it, Margaret?

MARGARET
You should go with him. You're
always here, Mr. Cronkite.

WALTER
Somebody has to be.

She's uncomfortable. He continues working.

MARGARET
Are we in trouble?

WALTER
Trouble...

MARGARET
The ratings. They're not very good,
are they?

WALTER
No, they're not.

MARGARET

The other girls are wondering... if they need to start looking for jobs.

(beat)

So am I.

He doesn't quite know what to say. The phone rings.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

I'll get that.

WALTER

I've got it.

He picks up his phone.

INT. CRONKITE HOME - 1:30 P.M.

A New York City townhouse on the Upper East Side. BETSY CRONKITE (40s) holds the phone with her shoulder as she sifts through notes by her typewriter.

BETSY CRONKITE

Kathy's done at 3:30, but Nancy has rehearsal and I've got to put the roast on this afternoon.

WALTER

I'm stuck here 'til at least nine.

BETSY CRONKITE

Why, what's wrong?

In the living room, a young boy walks up to Betsy. He is CHIP (12), their son.

CHIP

Can I watch television?

BETSY CRONKITE

Absolutely not.

Walter, on hearing Chip's voice:

WALTER

Isn't it a schoolday?

BETSY CRONKITE

He was suspended, Walter.

WALTER

Yes... of course.

BETSY CRONKITE

And you said you'd talk to him last night, if you don't remember.

WALTER

I'm sorry, Bets.

BETSY CRONKITE

And this morning you were out the door before any of us even woke up.

WALTER

Put him on, I'll talk to him now.

She holds the phone out.

BETSY CRONKITE

It's your father.

Chip comes up, takes the phone.

WALTER

Chip, I didn't think I'd raised a liar, son.

CHIP

I didn't lie.

WALTER

You cheated on your test. Cheating is lying.

CHIP

Yes, sir.

WALTER

You're going to junior high next year. You've gotta show 'em what you're made of off the bat, because if you give those folks a chance to doubt you, they'll never forget it.

Chip really doesn't want to be hearing this right now.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Work hard, and be honest. That's the kind of son I want to raise.

CHIP

Yes, sir.

Chip didn't absorb a word his father just said. He hands the phone back to Betsy, and she hands him a silver dollar.

BETSY CRONKITE
We need eggs.

CHIP
Oh, come on.

BETSY CRONKITE
One way or another, you're going to
be productive today, young man.

Chip sulks, takes the keys off the counter, heads out.

BETSY CRONKITE (CONT'D)
Back in five minutes or I'll know
you went to the candy store!

The door slams shut. She drops on the couch, exhausted.

WALTER
Well that went well.

Walter exhales, sits and rubs the bridge of his nose. Betsy
can hear the stress in his voice, his breathing.

BETSY CRONKITE
What's wrong?

WALTER
Remember how Don always used to say
I had a face for radio?

BETSY CRONKITE
Oh, Walter. Is it Jim again?

WALTER
The one and only.
(contemplating)
Maybe we should set the news on a
desert island.

BETSY CRONKITE
I don't know. All that sand, Walter.

WALTER
The Wild West, then.

BETSY CRONKITE
All that dust.

He chuckles. But he's anxious. And she can tell.

WALTER

He wants me to run a story. It's...
(struggling)
...it's not important.

Beat. She's concerned.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Maybe this just isn't for me, Bets.
Maybe Aubrey's right.

BETSY CRONKITE

I remember you saying the same thing
before Nancy was born. You didn't
think you'd be a good father.

WALTER

I'm still not sure I am.

BETSY CRONKITE

And that doubt -- that's exactly
what makes you a great one.

Walter looks at a PHOTO OF HIS THREE KIDS on his desk...

WALTER

You know, one night when I was 12,
all mother had to give us was a can
of dog food. I didn't mind it
really, it was fine. But the shame
in her eyes, that's what I couldn't
bear. I wanted to tell her it was
okay. But I didn't.

BETSY CRONKITE

That's not going to happen to us,
Walter. You know that.

WALTER

I do. But I don't ever want the
kids to worry that it could. The
worrying was the worst part.

BETSY CRONKITE

We've made a good life for them. A
steady life.

WALTER

I know.

BETSY CRONKITE

Here's what we're gonna do. Ready?

WALTER

Ready.

BETSY CRONKITE

When you get home we're going to put the kids to bed, turn off the television, drink sherry and watch the leaves fall on 84th Street. And we're not going to worry about a thing. How does that sound?

WALTER

Perfect.

BETSY CRONKITE

I'll see you later.

They hang up. Walter loosens his tie, unbuttons his shirt.

Deep breath. He looks around his office: Print stories framed, hanging on the wall. Several televisions, all off, a couple of radios, countless books and newspapers everywhere.

Sound slowly drowns out.

Horns honking, traffic outside. They all fade. Clacking typewriters, shouting voices in the newsroom, quieter as we retreat into Walter's thoughts. Considering, contemplating...

SUDDENLY, SOUND BACK IN:

He fishes KERNER'S FILE out of the trash. When he comes up, he STOPS and notices that framed FIRST BYLINE of his...

RACK FOCUS to see his reflection in it.

He has to look away.

He sets Kerner's file on his desk. Pushes the other stories he'd been working on aside. His head bowed in shame, he sets down a pad, and he begins outlining the Rockefeller story.

But, a muted sound is suddenly audible from the newsroom...

BELLS RINGING... And, like a fox hearing leaves rustle in the forest, Walter's ears perk up. He walks to the office door --

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - 1:34 P.M.

-- DING! DING! DING! DING! DING!

No one pays attention to the U.P.I. TELETYPE MACHINE in the corner as it punches out a wire. Walter walks to it, reads.

Ed Bliss crunches on an apple as he approaches...

ED BLISS
What is it?

Walter, reading the wire. An arcane set of symbols, and a brief message...

WALTER
Got a shooting in Dallas.

People hear, rise. Some gather around. Walter waits at the machine for more. Silent suspense. Nothing's coming.

Walter points to an EDITOR (20s) --

WALTER (CONT'D)
You: switch on every radio and television station and set up an open line with Bert.

The editor runs off. And BERT (30s) goes to his desk and picks up his phone, dials the STUDIO CONTROL ROOM --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

-- the Editor runs into the control room, the phone from Bert's call is already ringing. He flips on three TVs and a dozen radios, tunes them all to different stations. Rising cacophony. He picks up the ringing phone --

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

-- Bert listens on his line, then to Walter:

BERT
He's set.

Walter watches the teletype. Everyone waits.

MORT
Probably some drunk shooting off fireworks.

ED BLISS
It IS Texas after all...

CHARLES COLLINGWOOD (30s), handsome, Walter's on-air backup walks in from the break room:

COLLINGWOOD
What is it?

MARGARET
Shooting in Dallas.

The teletype machine is painfully inactive. No phones ringing in the newsroom. No voices. Everyone is frozen.

Silence.

Walter, a thought. He examines the machine. Flips the power switch back and forth. The light goes off and on. He grabs the sides, starts jiggering it. Harder. He pries the lid off.

NO FUCKING PAPER.

WALTER
Oh, come on.

SUPPLY CLOSET

Doors fling open! Editors hurl boxes aside and Walter and two young men haul out a big box of paper and rip the top off. Walter pulls out a massive side-punched ream.

THE REAM

slams on the floor next to the teletype with a THUD and Mort and Bliss quickly feed it in. Walter locks the teletype's steel cover back in place and flips the power switch BACK ON.

Everyone stares at the machine.

Still, nothing.

MORT
Mayb--

Suddenly, CLICK-CL-CLICK-CL-CLICK-CLICK...

The machine jolts to life! Spitting out a wire. Walter reads it. Everyone watching, waiting for word, an expression, anything. Producers, editors, secretaries...

WALTER
President's been shot.

Some gasp, cover their mouths. Others are stone-still. But all look to Walter for their next move...

WALTER (CONT'D)
Let's get on the air... NOW!

The place comes to life.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO - 1:36 P.M.

DARK LIKE A CRYPT.

O.S. clamor rising in volume, and people FLOOD THE SPACE.

Overhead lights FLIP ON. Margaret and other secretaries clear the newsdesk of junk, crumpled papers, empty soda bottles.

The massive STUDIO LIGHTS thunk ON.

CAMERAMEN sort through wires, plug them into cameras, power them on and swivel them into position.

A CONSOLE TECH powers up the board. Instrument needles jolt up to position. Vacuum tubes glow faintly on the gear.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR, 58TH STREET

Midtown Manhattan is alive outside as Hewitt pays for two slices of pizza to go. The payphone rings in the corner. A sweaty PIZZA MAN picks it up, listens...

PIZZA MAN

There a Don Hewitt here?

DON HEWITT

Yeah.

He hands Hewitt the phone.

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)

Yeah, Hewitt.

Hewitt listens. He drops the phone and runs out.

PIZZA MAN

Your pizza!

CUT TO:

A GRAINY, BLACK-AND-WHITE TV IMAGE:

A HOUSEWIFE (30s) dusts off books and restacks them on a shelf as she SINGS to herself. Her GRANDPA (80s) walks in with a cup of tea and the housewife smiles and takes it.

GRANDPA

Tell me now... what happened?

HOUSEWIFE

Happened?

GRANDPA

Not too often I hear you humming.
When you do, something happened.

HOUSEWIFE

You know me too well.

PULL BACK to reveal that this is "AS THE WORLD TURNS"
broadcasting now on CBS. PULL BACK farther and it is
COMPLETE FUCKING CHAOS in --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

-- Mort is shouting into a phone:

MORT

Try the switchboard dammit!

Another phone conversation:

TECH

The dual patch, dual patch!

MORT

Fine, get me master control!

Techs yelling at sound men in the broadcast studio -- sound
men yelling back at them -- can't hear through the window --
talk-back switch not working -- complete madness --

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

The TELETYPE punches out another message:

**REPORTED THREE SHOTS WERE FIRED AS THE MOTORCADE
ENTERED THE TRIPLE UNDERPASS**

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Cameramen swing into position, but --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

CONTROL ROOM OPERATOR

Where's picture?

Pre-broadcast monitors all show WHITE NOISE.

MORT

Audio! I need audio!

Audio men on their knees in the studio sorting through dozens of tangled wires on the floor, plugging several in --

AUDIO MAN

Now?

MORT

I got nothing!

CONSOLE TECH

Check the pre-amp!

In the studio, the sound man runs to a large equipment rack and switches on the pre-amp -- WHHEEEEE!! -- the FEEDBACK in the control room is ear-piercing! Everyone covers their ears!

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

ED BLISS

Another wire!

Walter tightening his tie hurries back to the U.P.I. teletype spitting out another message, people flurry around him.

**STAY OFF ALL OF YOU STAY OFF AND KEEP OFF
HX**

**M SPEAKING AT THE TT
WILL U U P L E A S E STAY OFF THE WIRE TIL WE
GIVEBBB HX**

**STAY OFF STAY OFF
MT HCR**

Walter reads as it continues punching out.

COLLINGWOOD

What's happening?

WALTER

The other bureaus are jamming the line. They're trying to free it up for Dallas...

(shouts across the room)

What's on the A.P. wire?

NEWS EDITOR

Nothing!

Ed -- WALTER

 ED BLISS

Yeah?

 WALTER

Our guys in Dallas.

 ED BLISS

On it.

Bliss runs to a phone, makes the call to Lew Wood and Rather.

THE ELEVATOR

dings open and Don Hewitt runs out and into the newsroom. He catches up with Walter who's mid-stride to the studio --

 DON HEWITT

Anyone go live?

 WALTER

Don't know.

And he doesn't care. They pass the TVs showing other networks and Hewitt looks at them as Walter enters the broadcast studio -- Hewitt breaks off into the control room where a dozen people frantically work to get up and running.

 WALTER (CONT'D)

The cameras are all pointing the wrong way.

 CAMERA ASSISTANT

They need to warm up.

 WALTER

How long?

 CAMERA ASSISTANT

15, 20 minutes.

 WALTER

We don't have 15 minutes.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

 DON HEWITT

Somebody get the lights on.

 LIGHTING MAN

They are on.

DON HEWITT
That's ON?

LIGHTING MAN
They gotta get hot for broadcast.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
The President of the United States
has been SHOT and people need to
know what's happening, so I don't
care if we have to send up smoke
signals, we're going to figure out
how to get them the damn news!

Walter storms away. He walks to a door outside the studio.
Turns the handle but it's locked.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Margaret!

Margaret opens her desk drawer and pulls out a large ring of
keys. She runs up and starts trying them one by one.

Fuck this:

WALTER (CONT'D)
Stand back.

Walter rears back, and --

INT. RADIO ROOM

-- RAMS the door open shoulder-first! He flips the lights on.
Hewitt hurries in to see what he's doing --

DON HEWITT
What are we thinking?

Walter turns more lights on. This room is musty and empty.

WALTER
Go with audio 'til cameras are
ready.

DON HEWITT
On the radio?

WALTER
On television.

MORT
What'll people see?

WALTER
Think of something.

Walter walks up to a tight RADIO BROADCAST BOOTH in the corner. He connects an old mic. A TECH powers up the system.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Ed Bliss, relaying a conversation from the phone --

ED BLISS
Parkland Hospital's been advised to stand by for a severe gunshot wound!

People turn and look.

MARGARET
Oh my God.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt is on the phone with the NETWORK'S MASTER CONTROL.

MASTER CONTROL OPERATOR (FROM PHONE)
We never patched in live before.

DON HEWITT
There are probably a lot of things you've never done before --

INT. CBS MASTER CONTROL ROOM, OFFSITE

A room humming with huge machines and bundles of cable.

MASTER CONTROL OPERATOR
-- I-I-I'm going to need authorization from Mr. Aubrey.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Mort flips through a storage box of PLACARDS and finds one that says "CBS NEWS BULLETIN." He runs and inserts it in front of a small GRAPHICS CAMERA outside the control room.

INT. RADIO ROOM

Three TECHS work to patch the radio room's audio feed into the control room, unspooling long cables through the halls --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

-- the techs connect the feed, the audio signal is clean.

TECH

Set.

COLLINGWOOD

ABC is live!

Hewitt sees ABC News rolling with it. Back to his phone call with master control:

DON HEWITT

Patch us in, or find another job.

INT. CBS MASTER CONTROL ROOM, OFFSITE

The nervous controller quickly inserts several CABLES into a gear rack and slides his wheelie-chair across the room to the main control board where a ROUTING SWITCH waits --

BLACK-AND-WHITE TELEVISION:

"As the World Turns," continuing...

HOUSEWIFE

And I thought about it. And I gave it a great deal of thought Grandp--

PICTURE ON THE MONITOR CUTS TO THE "NEWS BULLETIN" PLACARD

Sound of papers shuffling. A microphone BUMPS and THUMPS.

INT. RADIO ROOM - 1:40 P.M.

Walter and his techs move into place as he positions himself in the cramped booth -- the "ON AIR" light GLOWS.

WALTER

Here is a bulletin from CBS News. In Dallas, Texas, three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade in downtown Dallas.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

The U.P.I. TELETYPE chugs out another news alert. A WRITER rips it off and runs and hands it off to Ed Bliss. Bliss reads as he runs it up to the radio booth and --

INT. RADIO ROOM

-- hands it to Walter, who calmly speaks into the microphone.

WALTER

More details just arrived.

(scanning, reading)

These details, the same as previously. President Kennedy shot today just as his motorcade left downtown Dallas. Mrs. Kennedy jumped up and grabbed Mr. Kennedy. She called, "Oh, no." The motorcade sped on.

CLOSE UP on snippets of the previous wire's text: *"Seriously wounded... Perhaps fatally... Assassin's bullet..."*

WALTER (CONT'D)

United Press says the wounds for President Kennedy, perhaps, could be fatal. Repeating, a bulletin from CBS News: President Kennedy has been shot by a would-be assassin in Dallas, Texas. Stay tuned to CBS News for further details.

Awkward pause on the air -- Walter has nothing else.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt on the phone with MASTER CONTROL:

DON HEWITT

Cut back to the fucking soap!

INT. CBS MASTER CONTROL ROOM, OFFSITE

The CONTROLLER switches back to taped broadcast --

CLOSE-UP - A BLACK-AND-WHITE TELEVISION

A Nescafé commercial:

COMMERCIAL (V.O.)

It takes more than an instant to
make a real cup of coffee. That's
why Nescafé has come up with a new
kind of coffee...

AN ELDERLY COUPLE

watches the commercial on their television. They slowly turn
to each other, completely horrified. On TV, a man in a suit
drinks a delicious cup of coffee, smiles into camera.

COMMERCIAL (V.O.)

Let it brew in the cup a few
seconds longer for all that extra
flavor to come out.

INT. PARKLAND HOSPITAL

SIRENS WAILING outside. Dan Rather busts in and sprints down
the hospital hall, packed with REPORTERS, and COPS trying to
keep them all at bay. He runs up to a WHITE HOUSE AIDE
hurrying down a corridor.

WHITE HOUSE AIDE

We don't know anything.

DAN RATHER

Was the president hit?

WHITE HOUSE AIDE

We don't know.

The aide jogs away and POLICE block Rather off.

He looks down a hallway and sees a Secret Service AGENT
pounding the wall with his fist and slumping down. In another
hall, nurses are stained with blood, crying.

ON RATHER, this is bad...

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - 1:43 P.M.

DON HEWITT

Walter!

Cronkite runs up to Don, takes the phone from him.

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)

The kid Rather, in Dallas.

WALTER

Talk to me.

Intercut Rather, on a payphone in the hospital:

DAN RATHER

Two shots, maybe three, driving past the county courthouse.

WALTER

They came from the courthouse?

DAN RATHER

Not sure yet. Motorcade veered off. Kennedy's limo went to Parkland Hospital.

WALTER

Was Johnson in the limo?

DAN RATHER

No.

WALTER

Who was?

DAN RATHER

Jackie, Governor Connally. It happened so quickly. It's complete chaos here, there's fucking blood everywhere --

WALTER

-- Calm down, son. You're our eyes and ears on the ground there, understand?

DAN RATHER

Yes, sir.

WALTER

We're counting on you to find out what's happening -- the American people are counting on you. Can you get this story?

DAN RATHER

Damn right I can.

Another REPORTER runs up and tries to grab the phone from Rather, but he beats the man off with the receiver!

WALTER

What's going on?

DAN RATHER
U.P.I. guy.

WALTER
Dan, we need to know if he's alive.

DAN RATHER
The U.P.I. guy?

WALTER
The President!

DAN RATHER
Nobody's saying.

WALTER
Get them to say.

Walter hangs up. Rather leaves the phone dangling on its line as the U.P.I. man nurses his bloody forehead --

DAN RATHER
It's all yours.

-- Rather runs down the hall.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

WALTER
Someone get me a map of Dallas.

An editor runs off.

Walter stands over a table, assembling the teletypes, stitching pieces of information into a coherent narrative as everyone hurries around him. The editor runs back, flipping the pages of a huge U.S. ATLAS, slams it down.

Walter looks at the Dallas grid.

He marks off the TRADE MART, where the president was headed. Marks off PARKLAND HOSPITAL. Marks off the COUNTY COURTHOUSE.

Don Hewitt, on the phone getting more information --

DON HEWITT
-- A.P. photographer saw blood on
Kennedy's head --

Walter draws a line tracing Kennedy's probable route.

NEWS EDITOR
 (on another phone)
 Governor Donnelly was also hit!

WALTER
 Connally.

Cronkite writes down everything he's hearing in his own shorthand, staying calm and collected as voices shout from all angles around him --

PRODUCER
 -- CBS Radio says Jackie was
 cradling him in the back seat!

Walter perks up at that --

WALTER
 CBS Radio...

ED BLISS
 How the hell'd they get that??

Hewitt grabs a phone --

DON HEWITT
 I'll call Bill Shirley.

WALTER
 Shirley's not going to give a
 damn thing to television.
 (looks around)
 You --

A young CBS PAGE (teens) looks at Walter.

WALTER (CONT'D)
 -- run down to 52nd Street and find
 out where they're getting their news.

The Page runs to the stairwell, but --

WALTER (CONT'D)
 Take the elevator!

-- the kid runs back across the floor!

Walter sees Margaret in the corner nervous. Other secretaries hugging each other. Young reporters, anxious. Everyone wracked with fear, desperate to know what's happening.

PRODUCER (O.S.)
 NBC is live!

DON HEWITT

Shit.

WALTER

Okay, listen up, people. I don't care what the other networks are doing. I care what we're doing --

-- Walter looks at the CBS TELEVISION FEED: IT'S A FUCKING FRISKIES PUPPY FOOD COMMERCIAL.

WALTER (CONT'D)

I'm going back on the air.

DON HEWITT

We still don't have cameras, and we don't have any hard news.

WALTER

People are scared. Just put me on.

Hewitt holds on Walter. He nods.

TECH (PRE-LAP)

Two, one...

INT. RADIO ROOM - 1:46 P.M.

The tech points at Walter. On the MONITOR a COMMERCIAL cuts to a BLACK SCREEN -- no placard -- nothing.

WALTER

First reports of--

TECH

Something's wrong.

The feed is dead.

PRODUCER

Dead air!

WALTER

Somebody figure out what's--

TECH

You're on!

WALTER

First reports--

But the BLACK SCREEN cuts to an "AS THE WORLD TURNS" promo. Dreamy music to a spinning globe and a deep pre-taped voice --

CBS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And now --

-- and just as quick, AS THE WORLD TURNS cuts to BLACK again.

WALTER

I'm gonna lose it right here.

The techs work, Hewitt on the phone with MASTER CONTROL, and finally the BLACK SCREEN cuts to the CBS NEWS BULLETIN.

DON HEWITT (O.S.)

Go, Walter!

We're with him live in the radio booth, still AUDIO ONLY:

WALTER

Here is a bulletin from CBS News. Further details on an assassination attempt against President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas. President Kennedy was shot as he drove from Dallas Airport to downtown Dallas. Governor Connally of Texas in the car with him was also shot. It is reported that three bullets rang out --

INT. CRONKITE HOME

Betsy looks at her watch. Nervous. Where is Chip?

The phone rings. She picks up.

BETSY'S MOTHER (ON PHONE)

Are you watching CBS?

BETSY CRONKITE

I told you I don't like "As the World Turns," mother--

BETSY'S MOTHER (ON PHONE)

Turn it on, right now.

Betsy's mother and father are the same ELDERLY COUPLE that were watching the soap opera in their living room when Walter first patched in. Betsy clicks the TV on. No picture except for the CBS NEWS BULLETIN placard fading in --

WALTER (AUDIO FROM TV)

-- White House officials were in doubt in the corridors of the hospital as to the condition of President Kennedy.

(MORE)

WALTER (AUDIO FROM TV) (CONT'D)
 Repeating this bulletin, President Kennedy, shot as he and Governor Connally and Mrs. Kennedy rode in the back seat of an open car in Dallas. This incident has taken place only in the last few minutes in Dallas -- Stay tuned to CBS News for further details.

Betsy watches as the TV cuts back to AS THE WORLD TURNS.

BETSY'S MOTHER (FROM PHONE)
 Can you find out what's happening?

BETSY CRONKITE
 I'll call you back.

She hangs up, picks up the phone again but it RINGS for a split-second first and Betsy inadvertently picks up a call --

BETSY CRONKITE (CONT'D)
 Hello?

WOMAN (FROM PHONE)
 Betsy? What's happening?

BETSY CRONKITE
 I don't know, I'm trying to reach Walter. I'll call you back.

WOMAN (FROM PHONE)
 Okay, this is--

Betsy hangs up. But the phone rings AGAIN as she picks up.

MAN (FROM PHONE)
 -- Betsy, we just heard Walter's broadcast --

BETSY CRONKITE
 I'm trying to find out!

She hangs up again and looks at her watch. 20 minutes have passed since Chip left. Suddenly --

CRASH! -- a car screeches and SLAMS into another car outside the window. She looks down at the street below. The car BACKS UP, peeling rubber, and speeds away toward York Avenue.

People are panicking.

BETSY CRONKITE (CONT'D)
 Oh my God...

INT. STAIRWELL, CBS BUILDING

Mort and Collingwood and several others HUFF IT up the building's long stairwell and bust out --

EXT. CBS BUILDING ROOF

-- onto the roof of the CBS building, overlooking Manhattan. They fan out and look up at the open sky --

SECRETARY
(emerging from the stairs)
What are you doing?

MORT
They'd be coming from the East.

SECRETARY
What would be coming from the East?

MORT
Russian planes.
(she's confused)
This could be their first move.

SECRETARY
In what?

MORT
War.

The secretary's face drops.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

A producer hangs up the phone and runs up to Hewitt --

PRODUCER
Got a buddy at Sherman Air Force Base in Kansas says they're scrambling fighter jets and bombers.

DON HEWITT
Kansas?

PRODUCER
Other bases too. Says they want 'em in the air in case we're about to get hit.

DON HEWITT
Jesus Christ.

INT. CRONKITE HOME - GROUND FLOOR

Betsy runs down the foyer, opens the door and emerges onto --

EXT. NEW YORK CITY

-- the streets of the Upper East Side. She looks around.
YOUNG MEN up the block huddled around a transistor radio.
Some PEDESTRIANS running in the street, others just curious.

BETSY CRONKITE

Chip...

I/E. 52ND STREET, CBS RADIO

Midtown is more frantic. The PAGE Walter sent to CBS Radio busts inside and runs past the security desk --

SECURITY GUARD

Hey!

He hurries into the back halls of the studio, huffing and puffing -- a RADIO PRODUCER stops him --

RADIO PRODUCER

Who are you??

PAGE

Television, 57th Street. Where are you getting your news?

RADIO PRODUCER

Shove off.

He walks away, but --

PAGE

Cronkite sent me.

RADIO PRODUCER

Cronkite can kiss my fat ass.

PAGE

We're all just trying to get the story out, aren't we?

RADIO PRODUCER

Yeah, sure. Now get the hell out of my building.

Another PRODUCER calls out from the back --

RADIO PRODUCER #2
Barker's getting more from Dallas!
We're feeding it to Alan now!

That's the Page's answer. He smiles, backs away and runs off.

RADIO PRODUCER
Hey!

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - 1:51 P.M.

Walter and several PRODUCERS and EDITORS walking briskly --

ED BLISS
Witnesses saw bullet wounds in
Connally's chest. Blood on
Kennedy's head.

WALTER
Kennedy's or Connally's blood?

ED BLISS
I'm on it.

Bliss veers off.

WALTER
Did Secret Service return fire?

MORT
We don't know.

WALTER
What DO we know?

DON HEWITT (O.S.)
Walter!

Cronkite walks over as Hewitt is on the phone taking notes:

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)
Two people?

DAN RATHER (ON PHONE)
Yeah, crouched down.

DON HEWITT
Go get more.

Hewitt hangs up.

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)
 Rather's got a cop citing eyewitnesses who say shots came from a grassy hill in Dealey Plaza where two people were seen crouching down.

WALTER
 Shooters?

DON HEWITT
 Cops say maybe.

Walter walks back to the Atlas. He identifies the grassy knoll at Dealey Plaza, circles it --

WALTER
 Go get me a bigger map with this area circled, this, and this.

An Editor nods and runs off with the Atlas.

WALTER (CONT'D)
 Get those cameras running.

A producer halfway between Cronkite and the Studio shouts --

PRODUCER
 Cameras!?

CAMERA ASSISTANT (O.S.)
 Five minutes!

The Page runs back in from outside, completely out of breath.

WALTER
 What'd you get?

PAGE
 A guy named Barker in Dallas.

Walter looks to Margaret --

WALTER
 Margaret.

-- She's already on the job. She pulls out a national radio station directory and flips the pages to "B." She finds --

MARGARET
 Barker, Edward.

DON HEWITT
 Yeah -- KRLD?

MARGARET
That's right.

DON HEWITT
I know him.

WALTER
Get him on the phone. Let's hope he remembers you too.

Hewitt picks up a nearby phone --

DON HEWITT
Long distance. Dallas.

-- as Margaret shouts a number from across the room --

MARGARET
Addison-3, 4991.

DON HEWITT
Addis--
(listens to the operator)
-- then open an emergency line!

INT. TRADE MART, DALLAS - 1:53 P.M.

Dallas. A huge CONVENTION CENTER bustling with thousands of nervous ATTENDEES who were awaiting Kennedy's arrival.

On one of the interior balconies overlooking the convention floor, EDDIE BARKER (30s) is one of many journalists having similar technical problems to the CBS crew in New York --

WES
Eddie --

Barker is handed a phone by his assistant, WES (20s).

WES (CONT'D)
-- Don Hewitt in New York.

Barker takes the phone --

BARKER
Little busy right now, Don.

DON HEWITT (FROM PHONE)
We're getting Cronkite up and running and we need you to be our man on the ground in Dallas.

BARKER
That's television. We're radio.

DON HEWITT (FROM PHONE)
You got a camera?

BARKER
No.

DON HEWITT (FROM PHONE)
Does anyone there?

Barker looks around, sees a LOCAL NEWS CREW with a CAMERA.

BARKER
I see one, looks like it's getting
B-roll.

DON HEWITT (FROM PHONE)
Of?

BARKER
About 3,000 people crapping their
pants.

DON HEWITT (FROM PHONE)
Send us the feed and we'll put it
up with your voice behind it.

BARKER
Don, it's not--

DON HEWITT (FROM PHONE)
People are going to want to see
this, Ed.

BARKER
I'll try.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter walks into the broadcast studio, tightening his tie. Fits a talk-back EARPIECE in his ear. He sits at his NEWSDESK in front of the cameras. Ready to go, but --

TECH
We're still audio-only.

WALTER
We'll go anyway. When the cameras
are hot we'll cut to picture.

RALPH (50s), the chubby tech, starts setting up.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt, taking his stance at the helm of the control room as techs set up the audio feed from Walter's newsdesk.

Phone rings. Hewitt picks up --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

-- Walter, arranging notes on his desk, sees Hewitt lean over the console and flip the talk-back switch.

DON HEWITT (OVER TALK-BACK)
Barker's good in Dallas.

WALTER
Does he have anything new?

INT. CONTROL ROOM

DON HEWITT
(into phone)
Anything new?

Hewitt listens, relays the message --

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)
Two priests seen entering Parkland five minutes ago. His man heard the words "critical condition," not sure who they were talking about.

WALTER
We need sources.

DON HEWITT
Says no one's going on the record.

A LOUD VOICE bellows from down the hallway --

JIM AUBREY (O.S.)
What the shit is going on in here!?

DON HEWITT
President's been shot.

JIM AUBREY
Yeah, I heard it on NBC. Why are you standing there with your thumb up his ass? Why aren't you on the air!?

DON HEWITT
Cameras are almost ready.

JIM AUBREY
Chet Huntley's been on for five
minutes! Get me HIS cameras!

DON HEWITT
20 seconds.

JIM AUBREY
People tune to NBC now and they're
gonna stay there all goddamn night.

Ralph and other techs continue to set up. All the monitors in the control room display a picture -- on CBS, it's "As the World Turns." On NBC and ABC, news bulletins. On the pre-broadcast monitors, fuzzy images of Walter setting up at his desk as they adjust angles -- not clear enough for broadcast.

From the studio newsdesk --

WALTER
Don! --

Hewitt pushes the talk-back.

WALTER (CONT'D)
-- I want an open line to your man
at the Trade Mart --

DON HEWITT
Barker.

WALTER
-- and get Dan Rather in Dallas. I
want photos for air: Dealey Plaza,
street maps, and see if A.P. sent
anything new over the wire yet.

DON HEWITT
On it.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO - 1:54 P.M.

24 minutes since the shooting. Walter adjusts the distance of the desk microphone. Clears his throat. Margaret sets a glass of water on his desk. A hand on his shoulder, and a look.

Walter smiles. She heads off. He prepares for broadcast.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt overseeing everyone as they get situated. He watches monitors over the console. Various camera angles, still dark and blurry, not ready for air. On the main monitor -- the BROADCAST MONITOR -- another COMMERCIAL is running.

DON HEWITT
All set for audio?

CONSOLE TECH
Set.

DON HEWITT
(pressing talk-back)
Whenever you're ready, Walt.

WALTER
10 minutes ago. Let's go!

DON HEWITT
In five, four--

WALTER
Flip the damn switch!

Hewitt flips the switch.

DON HEWITT
On the air.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter jumps back into his AUDIO-ONLY broadcast, but now he's in the Broadcast Studio:

WALTER
Here is a bulletin from CBS News. President Kennedy has been the victim of an assassin's bullets in Dallas, Texas. It is not known as yet whether the president survived the attack against him. The incident was this: the president and Mrs. Kennedy and Governor Connally of Texas driving in the president's famed bubble-top car from Dallas Airport to downtown Dallas where the president was scheduled to make a speech. Three bullet shots were heard to ring out.

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

The president slumped into the lap of Mrs. Kennedy. Witnesses said they saw blood on his head.

Walter, gleaning all this from various teletype printouts, from his own notes, from memory. Hewitt watches him work.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Governor Connally slumped into the bottom of the car. Bullet wounds were seen to be in his chest. The car itself rushed on as Mrs. Kennedy was heard to say, "Oh, no." It took them directly to a nearby hospital, the Parkland Hospital, where the president and Governor Connally were taken into the emergency room, and witnesses there refused to comment on whether the president was still alive or not.

Cronkite flips through more pages of notes.

WALTER (CONT'D)

As the... bullets... were heard to ring out of the assassin's gun, Serpet-- Secret Service men unlimbered their automatic rifles, but the damage, of course, by then had already been done.

Trying to get his footing. Margaret hands him a new TELETYPE.

WALTER (CONT'D)

As these details come in, let me read a few to you from the press service wires reaching us only now from Dallas.

(reading, interpreting)

After these three loud bursts of gunshot, Dallas motorcycle officers escorting the president quickly leaped from their bikes and raced up a grassy hill. At the top of the hill a man and woman appeared huddled on the ground. In the turmoil it has been impossible so far to determine whether the Secret Service and Dallas Police returned the gunfire that struck down Kennedy and Connally --

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)
 -- or whether this couple at the top of the hill, crouched down in their inert forms as the police rushed them, were the would-be assassins. Stay tuned for further details from CBS News.

Walter comes away from the mic, ready to go back to sleuthing out the details of the story, but --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

JIM AUBREY
 He stays on.

DON HEWITT
 With what? He's out of news.

JIM AUBREY
 I give a shit? He loves to hear his own voice so much, he's gonna hear it all day and night or so help me.

DON HEWITT
 We don't have anything else --

-- Hewitt leans in to the console to switch away --

JIM AUBREY
 Don't touch that fucking button,
 Don -- Don? -- DON'T TOUCH IT!

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter looks into the control room. Hewitt signals him to keep going. Walter signals back, "With what?" He can see Aubrey shouting. Meanwhile, dead air. FUCKING DO SOMETHING!

WALTER
 We'll bring you details, now, more details on the attempted assassination of President Kennedy. Mrs. Kennedy was on her knees we're told, on the floor of the rear seat of the car, her head toward the president, apparently leaning over and trying to converse with him.

Mort hurries in and hands Walter an A.P. wire --

WALTER (CONT'D)

An A.P. reporter who was with the group said that this man and woman we reported earlier were on a hilltop -- were seen scrambling to the upper level of a walkway overlooking an underpass at which the car was approaching.

(another wire, reading)

Lawrence O'Brien, the presidential aide, says he has no information on whether the president is still alive. Mrs. Kennedy was weeping, trying to --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

JIM AUBREY

He's all over the place.

DON HEWITT

He's working with what he's got, he'll get the swing of it.

Phone rings, a PRODUCER picks up.

PRODUCER

(into phone)

Yes, sir.

(to Aubrey)

Mr. Aubrey, it's the Chairman for you -- Mr. Paley.

Aubrey walks out of the control room. Hewitt watches him.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER

-- that Vice President Lyndon Johnson was in the car behind the president. There was no immediate sign that he was hurt. Repeating that: no indication Vice President Johnson was hurt. In fact, there was no evidence at all of what might have happened to Johnson since only the President's car and its secret service followup car went on to the hospital.

Collingwood hands Walter another piece of paper -- IT'S BLANK -- Walter tosses it.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Let us recount this incident again --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

As Walter continues, Hewitt works the techs --

DON HEWITT
Cameras, fellas?

-- Ralph and the other techs are on it, trying to get the cameras up to broadcast speed --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
-- crouched with a crowd around
them on a hilltop --

STUDIO LIGHTS BLARE BRIGHT as Walter is talking! He averts his eyes, but doesn't break stride --

WALTER (CONT'D)
-- whether they were concerned in
the shooting or not we do not know
yet --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

DON HEWITT
Get the lights out of his eyes!

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Cronkite lifts the mic -- still audio only -- and swivels his chair away from the blinding lights. Techs run in, making a ruckus in the B.G., and adjust the lights to proper intensity.

WALTER
-- Secret Service men rushed to
that scene and we're awaiting a
report on that --

-- Walter turns back to his desk, continuing, sets the mic down gently --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Aubrey hurries back in after his call with his boss --

JIM AUBREY

Gimme that master control --
 (grabs a PHONE from Mort)
 -- Get the affiliates patched-in in
 the next two minutes... ALL OF THEM!

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - 1:58 P.M.

The U.P.I. TELETYPE spitting out a new alert. An EDITOR rips it away. Margaret takes off her high heels and tosses them, grabs the wire and runs out of the newsroom, into the studio.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter, cruising --

WALTER

-- however, aides very close to President Kennedy had no comments when they were asked by reporters the seriousness of the President's injury --

Margaret hands Walter the latest wire report. He scans it:

WALTER (CONT'D)

Late information just in: acting White House Secretary Malcolm Kilduff was asked whether the president was dead --

SUDDENLY, EVERYONE -- Hewitt, Aubrey, Bliss, Mort, the techs, secretaries, producers -- all stop what they're doing and look directly to Walter --

WALTER (CONT'D)

-- and he said, "I have no word now" --

Everyone returns back to work. Walter, not breaking stride.

WALTER (CONT'D)

-- the president had landed just a short time before at Dallas --

INT. TRADE MART, DALLAS

Eddie Barker is arguing with the local camera crew --

BARKER

It's CBS national! Every affiliate
in the country's waiting on us.

LOCAL DALLAS NEWSMAN

Why should we give it to you?

BARKER

Look, patch me in to your camera.
I'll be up here and you be down on
the floor getting interviews.

The local newsman considers. He agrees.

BARKER (CONT'D)

(to Wes)

Go! Go! Go!

Barker's assistant Wes rushes, unspooling a cable from the
KRLD desk to the local Dallas TV camera setup, but --

WES

Cable doesn't reach!

BARKER

We need an extension.

Wes, running back up --

WES

There's a jack somewhere.

BARKER

Come on, already.

They scrounge through a crate of gear, can't find it.

BARKER (CONT'D)

Go get a longer cable.

WES

They don't make 'em any longer.

BARKER

Screw this.

Barker runs over to the camera, a massive IMAGE ORTHICON.

BARKER (CONT'D)

Get off your butt and help me!

Several men bear down and hoist the camera up and start
carrying it along the Trade Mart's balcony to the KRLD desk.

All the while, people on the convention floor are starting to freak out. An African-American waiter leans against the stage wiping his eyes with a napkin. Others, hugging. All afraid.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Still no cameras, AUDIO ONLY --

WALTER

-- luncheon speech which was to be sponsored by three Dallas organizations. The largest turnout of the current Texas tour was on the streets to greet Kennedy. He was being greeted lavishly by the crowd in a very warm Texas welcome when the bullet, uh-- fired out of the crowd --

-- as he's handed a wire, reads, it's nothing new --

WALTER (CONT'D)

Stay tuned, we'll bring you the details just as quickly as they come in.

Bliss signals no new wires...

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Aubrey leans over and pushes the talk-back:

JIM AUBREY

If you don't have any news, you MAKE some.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter gets the talk-back in his earpiece. His jaw tightens.

WALTER

It might be recalled that, uh-- Dallas has been a hot-bed of criticism of President Kennedy and his administration by outspoken rightist groups. Only two weeks ago, Ambassador Adlai Stevenson of the United Nations was in an incident in Dallas when he was besieged by pickets, for -- right wing pickets --

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)
 -- outside a speech he made there,
 and he was struck in the head by a
 picket sign by an outraged
 conservative who felt we should not
 be in the United Nations. Even today
 through Dallas there were cars
 touring the streets with signs,
 "U.S. or U.N."

Another wire report comes in, taking pressure off --

WALTER (CONT'D)
 A little late information: Rear
 Admiral George Burkley, United
 States Navy, the White House
 Physician, rushed into that
 Parkland Hospital in Dallas. He
 headed for the emergency room where
 the president and Governor Connally
 were taken. Still awaiting word as
 to the condition of the president
 from that emergency room.

Walter assesses the notes on his desk. Improvising. He's
 still audio-only.

WALTER (CONT'D)
 Governor Connally, of Texas, is the
 young governor who managed the
 campaigns --

Techs still working on the cameras right in front of him.
 Arguing with each other. Walter, trying to focus.

WALTER (CONT'D)
 -- over the last several senatorial
 and Vice Presital-- Vice Presidential
 campaigns of Johnson --

Light now at a good level illuminating him -- the MAKE-UP
 GIRL approaches and starts applying foundation --

WALTER (CONT'D)
 -- he is a leader of what is
 considered the more conservative wing
 of the Democratic party in Texas --

Walter waves the make-up girl away.

WALTER (CONT'D)

-- part of the reason for President Kennedy's being in Texas was said, was to try to patch up differences between the conservative and liberal wings of the Democratic party which, uh, it was believed endangered the chances of the administration taking Texas in the 1964 election.

Now settling in, finding his groove, waiting for the cameras.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Let's recount again that President Kennedy and Governor Connally of Texas lie in the emergency room at Parkland Hospital in Dallas as an anxious world waits to learn how serious are the injuries they suffered from an assassin's bullets.

INT. PARKLAND HOSPITAL - 2:07 P.M.

REPORTERS hound Kennedy's AIDES as they leave a holding room. Dan Rather spots Al Thomas, the congressman from earlier, squeezing away. He runs down a far hall to cut him off.

DAN RATHER

What'd they say?

AL THOMAS

GO. AWAY.

DAN RATHER

People are panicking, Al. The country, the WORLD, is panicking. For all our sakes. Please.

The congressman stops. He considers...

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

A phone rings. An editor runs and picks it up.

NEWS EDITOR

Yeah?

The editor SHOUTS across the room:

NEWS EDITOR (CONT'D)

Mort!

A PENCIL

scribbling a quick note on a pad. Paper ripped away. Mort hands it off. A producer runs it across the newsroom and --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

-- into the studio, hands it off to Margaret who looks and hurries it to Walter who's still audio-only, he takes it calmly as he's speaking:

WALTER

A late bulletin --
(beat)

-- Representative Albert Thomas,
the Democrat from Houston Texas,
says that he has been informed that
President Kennedy and Governor
Connally of Texas ARE STILL ALIVE.

People in the control room relax just a little bit. Hewitt bows his head, emotions coming up to the surface. Margaret watches as Walter continues, hope in her eyes.

Walter, though, unlike everyone else is stone-cold focused:

WALTER (CONT'D)

-- this is the first word that we
have had definitely from the
emergency room, giving us some hope
that they survived this
assassination attempt --

EXT. NEW YORK CITY

Betsy hurries up 86th Street past worried New Yorkers, horns honking, traffic, and she walks into a GROCERY STORE --

INT. GROCERY STORE

-- looks down the aisles, sees SHOPPERS stocking up on bread and milk and other essentials -- but she doesn't see Chip.

She hurries to the MANAGER --

BETSY CRONKITE

Have you seen a young boy, 12,
about this tall?

GROCERY MANAGER

I'm sorry, no.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Aubrey on the phone with the chairman of the network --

JIM AUBREY
Right away, Mr. Paley --

-- he hangs up.

JIM AUBREY (CONT'D)
Don! He wants our men on the scene.

DON HEWITT
They're already there.

JIM AUBREY
The SCENE -- where it happened.

Off Hewitt's look...

INT. PARKLAND HOSPITAL

Lew Wood, on the phone with Hewitt --

DON HEWITT (ON PHONE)
We need you to get to Dealey.

LEW WOOD
What about Kennedy?

DON HEWITT (ON PHONE)
We're getting it from the wires, but
I need you to get down there and
find out what the hell happened.

LEW WOOD
Alright.

DON HEWITT (ON PHONE)
And, Lew: get film.

Lew hangs up. Sees Rather and Huffaker coming up the hall.

LEW WOOD
Let's go!

They follow him.

EXT. PARKLAND HOSPITAL

They bust outside. Surrounding the hospital, THROGS have gathered. The guys run around back. Their car is boxed in.

LEW WOOD

Shit.

Before they can figure out their next move, Rather jumps in.

He shifts into gear and hits the gas! Slams into the car blocking them! BURNING RUBBER as he PUSHES it out of the way!

LEW WOOD (CONT'D)

What is it with this kid and cars?

COPS look over from the front of the hospital.

Once free, Rather slams on the brakes.

DAN RATHER

Get in!

Lew and Huffaker jump in the car. Rather peels back toward the scene of the shooting.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

TVs running other broadcasts:

ABC BROADCAST (ON TV)

-- are now reporting automatic
gunfire --

NBC BROADCAST (ON TV)

-- a man in the crowd with a sign
that said "I hold John F. Kennedy
in utter contempt" --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO - 2:16 P.M.

Walter, still continuing his audio-only broadcast --

WALTER

-- it was impossible, they tell us
now, under the tension at the
hospital, to assemble any clear-cut
story of the incident because the
burst of gunfire of course took
only seconds and from there on out,
confusion. Some of the Secret
Service agents thought the gunfire,
however, was from an automatic
weapon fired to the right-rear of
the chief executive's car --

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)
 -- possibly from a grassy knoll,
 and that's that knoll to which
 motorcycle policemen were seen
 racing, and where the huddled
 figures of a man and a woman were
 seen on the ground with a crowd
 surrounding them, which suggests of
 course that perhaps this is where
 the shots came from. This we do not
 know as yet, positively --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt gets Walter's attention, leans into the talk-back --

DON HEWITT
 We're ready to go on-air but we
 need to take a --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

-- Walter, getting the message from Don and seamlessly
 integrating it into his broadcast --

WALTER
 We'll be back in 10 seconds to
 allow all our stations to identify
 themselves and to join the network.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

BROADCAST MONITOR: The "CBS BULLETIN" PLACARD cuts to a CBS
 EYE. Then after a beat, BLACK SCREEN. Everyone, working.

DON HEWITT
 I want picture when we come back.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

The editors and newsmen sitting at desks behind Walter get up
 to move out of the way, but --

WALTER
 Stay there.

NEWS EDITOR
 We're in frame.

WALTER
 It's alright.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

DON HEWITT
Here we go.

CLOSE-UP - BLACK-AND-WHITE TELEVISION:

Black Screen cuts to the CBS BULLETIN PLACARD, but the picture is unstable, V-hold sporadic, out of control --

INT. BETSY'S PARENTS' HOME

Betsy's parents, watching in their living room. V-hold rushing upward. Sound cutting in, then out. Strange radio dial noises peak in pitch and drop again.

INT. NEW YORK DINER

A hole-in-the-wall diner. PATRONS stand up from their seats as the MANAGER carries a television out from the back, plugs it in on the counter and tunes it to CBS -- the image flickering from BLACK to WHITE.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Piercing feedback again! Everyone covers their ears, again. Techs turn down several pre-amp dials. The sound stabilizes.

INT. CBS MASTER CONTROL ROOM, OFFSITE

The controller, on the phone with Hewitt --

MASTER CONTROLLER
Affiliates are patched in.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

DON HEWITT
Go.

The console tech flips switches quickly, and finally --

2:18 P.M. - BROADCAST MONITOR:

For the first time, PICTURE FADES IN.

Walter at his desk.

The frame is unstable, cycling upward, audio tones still adjusting, but he ignores it all --

WALTER (ON TV)
This is Walter Cronkite in our
newsroom in --

His sound cuts out, unsynched, but he continues to talk.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Don, orchestrating --

DON HEWITT
Let's get him back.
(techs work)
And watch the V-hold.

Ralph is on it.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
There has been an attempt, as
perhaps you know now, on the life
of President Kennedy.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

BROADCAST MONITOR: PICTURE FINALLY STABILIZES.

DON HEWITT
And sound --

Another tech works it. Sound stabilizes.

WALTER (ON TV)
He was wounded in an automobile
driving from Dallas Airport into
downtown Dallas along with Governor
Connally of Texas --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
-- they've been taken to Parkland
Hospital there, where their
condition is as yet unknown.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt picks up a phone line on hold --

DON HEWITT
Barker ready?

Off Hewitt's signal, a tech re-routes several wires.

INT. TRADE MART, DALLAS

Barker's assistant on the phone shouting down the balcony --

WES
Six! Five! Four!

-- Eddie Barker clears his throat, leans into his mic.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
-- a group had been gathered to hear President Kennedy and was awaiting his arrival. Let's switch down there now where Eddie Barker of KRLD is on the air.

Walter starts sorting through papers at his desk. He's still on the air. He looks into the control room and sees Hewitt and his techs trying to sort the connection out --

WALTER (CONT'D)
We're trying to get that connection to Dallas now. Just as soon as we can get Dallas on the air we, you shall see the scene at the-- hotel, where we understand the audience is just being told about the incident in their city, the shooting of President Kennedy and of Governor Connally.

As the control room goes crazy, Walter is handed a NEW WIRE:

WALTER (CONT'D)
A word just in from Congressman Jim Wright from Fort Worth -- says that he understands that both President Kennedy and Governor Connally, while seriously wounded, are still alive. Mrs.--

CLOSE-UP, BLACK-AND-WHITE TELEVISION:

THE IMAGE CUTS to the TRADE MART. The Dallas camera panning slowly across the convention center's interior balconies.

BARKER (V.O. ON TV)
 -- there is a look of shocked
 disbelief in this crowd that has
 turned out for the president --

INT. TRADE MART, DALLAS

The same scene, but live. The anxious Trade Mart crowd.

BARKER
 -- it was only a couple of weeks ago
 that an incident occurred here that
 caused some to think that it would
 have been better had President
 Kennedy not gone ahead with his
 announced plans of coming to Dallas --

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

JIM AUBREY
 What are you doing?

-- Jim Aubrey walks in as Walter coordinates with his reporters and producers --

WALTER
 Unconfirmed reports are coming in
 from every direction.

JIM AUBREY
 So what?

WALTER
 No way to tell what's real -- we
 need to find out what's going on.

JIM AUBREY
 No, you need to sit your ass back
 down in that chair.

WALTER
 So now you want me in the chair.

JIM AUBREY
 Don't fuck with me, Walter.

WALTER
I'm doing my job.

JIM AUBREY
Your job isn't to get the news. Your job is to read it. People don't want to watch footage of some hick in some goddamned convention center --

WALTER
-- No, they want to watch Ginger's tits on Jillian's Island.

DON HEWITT
Walter.

Hewitt knows it's a bad idea to taunt Aubrey.

JIM AUBREY
You've got five seconds to get back in that chair, or so help me I'll put that son of a bitch in it:

Aubrey points to the young PAGE from earlier. The kid makes a "Who, me?" face. Walter holds on Aubrey for a tense beat...

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Trade Mart audio keeps coming in and out, more sound issues.

BARKER (ON TV)
-- the attempted assassins -- we now hear it was a man and a woman who fired the shots -- were on the edge of a building near the Houston Street underpass --

A CAMERA TECH walks up to Mort, who's overseeing the room while Hewitt is with Walter and Aubrey --

CAMERA TECH
We might have a problem. We've never run these cameras for more than 30 minutes. I don't know how long 'til they burn out.

MORT
There's no others?

Tech shakes his head no. Mort thinks.

MORT (CONT'D)

There's a dozen shows shooting in this building. Run down to one of the studios and steal a camera. Quick.

The tech taps a buddy and they both run off.

EXT. DEALEY PLAZA, DALLAS

Rather screeches his car to a halt at the scene of the shooting. He and Lew and Huffaker pan around and take in Dealey Plaza, still bustling with frantic energy, POLICE and SECRET SERVICE trying to round up witnesses, cordon the area.

There's blood on the asphalt.

LEW WOOD

Jesus Christ.

Lew kneels down to see. Huffaker breaks out his camera, starts filming.

DAN RATHER

We need to find witnesses.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Mort, shouting from way back in the control room --

MORT (O.S.)

20 seconds for Walter!

-- Walter walking that way, Hewitt and others trailing --

WALTER

-- how many shooters, from where, is he alive -- all of it.

ED BLISS

We're trying everybody.

WALTER

Well KEEP trying!

ED BLISS

I don't know what to do if they won't talk to us, Walter.

WALTER

You keep asking the question. The truth is out there, we just need to find it. Dig, dammit! Come on!

MORT (O.S.)
10 seconds!

Walter heads away and Mort and the guys get back to the phones -- Hewitt catches up with Walter, they walk --

DON HEWITT
They're scared, Walter.

WALTER
No time for that.

DON HEWITT
It's the president of the United States. Ease off a little bit.

WALTER
That bastard in there wants me spewing whatever sensationalist crap he can get his hands on and he doesn't give a damn about people being scared. He WANTS them scared.

DON HEWITT
I'll keep him in check.

WALTER
You want to help, Don, figure out a way to get me off the air again so I can go back to getting this story, since no one else here seems interested in that.

Walter breaks off and walks to the studio. Hewitt watches him, hands on his hips.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter walks back in and sits at the desk --

CONSOLE TECH (V.O.)
Two... one...

INT. CONTROL ROOM

BROADCAST MONITOR: Picture cuts back to Walter.

WALTER (ON TV)
That was a report from Eddie Barker at our affiliate KRLD in Dallas --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER

-- the scene you saw was the luncheon to which President Kennedy was en route. He was planning to address that luncheon with one of his strongest statements yet against those who, as he said, would turn the clock back. But he did not get an opportunity to make that speech. He was cut down by bullets as his motorcade approached downtown Dallas. He is now in the emergency room of Parkland Hospital in Dallas. As of ten minutes ago a White House aide said the president is still alive. The extent of his injury, the -- whether it is critical or not -- has not been officially confirmed by doctors from Parkland Hospital. Whether the assassin has been caught or not is not known as yet either.

INT. COURTROOM

An empty, dark courtroom.

CAMERA ASSISTANT (O.S.)

Shit!

The camera tech trips over lighting gear while running down the aisle. We realize this is a set for PERRY MASON.

They hurry to one of the idle cameras and start wheeling it down the courtroom aisle, shoving stray gear out of the way.

CAMERA TECH

Hurry up!

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

With Walter mid-broadcast, Don walks over and hands him a PHOTO glued to a cardboard backing --

DON HEWITT

Taken just before the incident.

WALTER

Thank you, Don.

Walter gives him a very quick signal with his eyes -- "GET ME OFF" -- then, looks at the photo and holds it up to CAMERA.

WALTER (CONT'D)

This picture has just been transmitted by wire. It is a picture taken just a moment or two before the incident. If you could zoom in with that camera we can get a closer look at this picture.

Camera zooms in awkwardly.

WALTER (CONT'D)

You can see the president in an open car -- the famed bubble-top was not being used today -- the president out in the open on a balmy Texas day --

EXT. NEW YORK CITY

Betsy, looking in all directions. People scurrying. Traffic in the streets. She runs into a CANDY SHOP on the corner --

INT. CANDY SHOP

-- the PROPRIETOR is listening to the radio.

BETSY CRONKITE

Have you seen Chip?

CANDY STORE PROPRIETOR

No, did you hear about the Presi--

She's already gone.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY

Back outside, looking for her boy. Cars speeding past, running red lights, no sign of him.

And then, she hears a voice...

WALTER (O.S.)

It had been raining earlier in Fort Worth when he made an appearance there to cheering crowds in a parking lot...

It's coming from the hole-in-the-wall DINER down the block.

INT. DINER

Betsy walks in. People are huddled around the television.

And there's Chip. Watching his father.

Betsy runs up, hugs him.

CHIP

They were all out of eggs.

She smiles, chuckles. Collects herself.

BETSY CRONKITE

Let's get your sisters.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY

Betsy and Chip hurry out. She hails a cab and they get in.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt, into the phone:

DON HEWITT

Okay, stand by.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Cameras and lights are starting to generate SIGNIFICANT HEAT. Walter, starting to feel it as he points to the photo --

WALTER

You see the president here, the motorcycle policeman who undoubtedly was deeply involved in this matter before it was all over immediately behind, and right over in here you can perhaps see some of the Secret Service agents who were undoubtedly involved, as well. They were not able to prevent the president being shot --

Hewitt signals Walter from the control room.

DON HEWITT (ON EARPIECE)

-- going back to Dallas, prayers now for the president --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

JIM AUBREY
What are you doing? Stay on.

Hewitt ignores Aubrey --

DON HEWITT
In three...

JIM AUBREY
Don!

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
We're now going into that Dallas luncheon the president had planned to address -- let's go back -- prayers, we understand, are underway.

DON HEWITT (ON EARPIECE)
-- one, and go.

They switch back to the Trade Mart.

Walter stands up in the news studio and quickly WALKS AWAY.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

JIM AUBREY
Put him back on.

DON HEWITT
You want to tell the American people they can't watch a prayer for the president's life?

ON THE MONITOR:

A PRIEST at the podium recites a PRAYER. Everyone in the Trade Mart -- 3,000 people -- on their feet, heads bowed.

Aubrey, silent. Hewitt walks out.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Walter enters the newsroom --

WALTER

I want everyone calling sources.
Start with the cabinet. Rusk,
McNamara, Dillon, Salinger --

MORT

You think we haven't been, Walter?
They're all on a plane.

WALTER

To Dallas?

MORT

Japan.

WALTER

What?

Walter, curious.

WALTER (CONT'D)

You're telling me the Secretary of
State and the Secretary of Defense
are on a plane halfway around the
world when the president is shot.

Mort nods yes. What the hell. PHONE RINGS. Walter picks up:

WALTER (CONT'D)

Yes...

There's an OLD WOMAN on the other end:

OLD WOMAN (FROM PHONE)

Is this CBS News?

Walter, antsy, was hoping for a source --

WALTER

Yes, it is.

OLD WOMAN (FROM PHONE)

Well, I just want to say that it's
the worst bad taste to have that
Walter Cronkite on the air when
everyone knows he hated the
president.

WALTER

Madam, this is Walter Cronkite. And
you're a goddamned idiot.

He SLAMS the phone down. Addresses the newsroom:

WALTER (CONT'D)

It's time to bear down. Wires from
A.P. and U.P.I. are solid, but I want
everything else triple-sourced.

Hewitt walks in --

DON HEWITT

We bought some time, but Aubrey's
fuming.

WALTER

Let him fume.

Ed Bliss, at one of the wire machines --

ED BLISS

D.P.D. found bullet shells in a
Book Depository near Dealey!

Walter hurries over, reads --

WALTER

I need that line to Dallas.

PRODUCER

Here. Dan.

Walter takes the phone. Dial tone.

WALTER

He's not on.

PRODUCER

I just had him.

Walter can't work the phone. He dials zero.

OPERATOR (FROM PHONE)

CBS.

WALTER

Whatever line they've got Dan
Rather on.

OPERATOR (FROM PHONE)

Connecting.

Walter, anxious as the phone rings --

WALTER

Come on!

EXT. DEALEY PLAZA

A payphone ringing. Rather runs and picks it up.

DAN RATHER

Rather.

WALTER

What have you got?

DAN RATHER

Police are taking a roll-call of
Depository employees.

And they are, right outside the Book Depository.

WALTER

And...

DAN RATHER

Still waiting.

WALTER

We're getting conflicting reports
from every angle, Dan. Some saying
Book Depository, second floor, some
saying fifth floor. Some say a
hillside on the other end of
Dealey. We need you to go find out
if that shot can be made from the
Depository building.

DAN RATHER

Got it.

DON HEWITT

And film it, Dan.

Rather hangs up as Lew and Huffaker run up to him.

LEW WOOD

What's he want?

Rather thinks, looks around the scene. He spots a PAWN SHOP a
couple of blocks down. And he has an idea...

DAN RATHER

Come on.

He runs toward it. The guys follow.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Walter signals Hewitt for a moment alone.

INT. CBS NEWS CORRIDORS

They walk down a hallway --

WALTER

Let me ask you a question: no bubbletop on the car, half the cabinet's in the air to Asia when the shooting happens -- what does that say to you?

DON HEWITT

Coincidence? Conspiracy? Who knows.

WALTER

Doesn't feel right.

From the other room, a News Editor reading the wires:

NEWS EDITOR (O.S.)

They just shut the stock market down! Massive selloff!

Walter and Don look at each other.

DON HEWITT

You want to go with it?

WALTER

Not 'til we know more.

DON HEWITT

Aubrey'd give you some breathing room, that's for sure.

Walter considers, but...

WALTER

No.

Aubrey storms around the corner, looking for Walter.

JIM AUBREY

Enough of this prayer bullshit. Get that son of a bitch behind the desk!

Walter, on hearing Aubrey, entrusts this lead to Hewitt:

WALTER
Find out what you can.

Hewitt nods.

Walter walks back to Aubrey.

Hewitt veers off down the other end of the newsroom. He walks up to Mort, signals a word in private --

DON HEWITT
Find me the Russian Ambassador.

MORT
You want a comment?

DON HEWITT
Not on the record. Feel him out,
see how this affects their agenda,
find out what their plans are.

MORT
And if I can't get him?

DON HEWITT
Get on your knees and pray he's not
on a plane back to Moscow.

Hewitt walks into his office and picks up the phone --

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)
Get me the White House, Arthur
Redmond's office --

INT. PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL, NEW YORK

Betsy and Chip hurry down an empty hall.

BETSY CRONKITE
Where is everyone?

They turn a corner and see an open door to a large classroom.

STUDENTS and TEACHERS gathered watching the television.

KATHY and NANCY CRONKITE (teenagers) see Betsy. They run up and hug her and Chip, frightened.

KATHY CRONKITE
What's happening, mommy??

BETSY CRONKITE
I don't know. Let's go home.

INT. PAWN SHOP, DALLAS

Rather, Lew and Huffaker run into a Dallas pawn shop where the MANAGER is watching NBC NEWS on a small TV on a shelf.

DAN RATHER
You got any rifles for sale?

PAWN SHOP MANAGER
You kidding?

On the TV:

NBC BROADCASTER (ON TV)
-- that police are searching for a
25-year-old man, slender build --

Lew Wood looks to Rather --

LEW WOOD
Go get on that.

DAN RATHER
But the--

LEW WOOD
Go!

Rather flies out of the pawn shop. The manager sets a bolt-action RIFLE down on the countertop for Lew...

LEW WOOD (CONT'D)
Perfect.

EXT. BOOK DEPOSITORY, DALLAS

Lew and Huffaker run around the corner in view of the Book Depository. Lew is holding the rifle wrapped sloppily in paper. Police have cleared the area. It's not cordoned off.

HUFFAKER
This is absolutely insane.

LEW WOOD
Probably.

Lew runs in. Huffaker shakes his head, follows reluctantly.

INT. BOOK DEPOSITORY, DALLAS

They bolt upstairs, get to the sixth floor, look around and see a "sniper's nest" of STACKED BOXES barricading an open window. The melee from the street, audible.

HUFFAKER

Jesus in Heaven. That's it.

Lew walks behind the boxes to the windowsill, aims the rifle down to the blood stains on the street, the crime scene. Huffaker filming as Lew looks through the telescopic sight.

LEW WOOD

Hard shot.

HUFFAKER

But possible?

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

FREEZE!

A POLICEMAN standing across the room, gun aimed at the guys.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)

Put it down, now!

LEW WOOD

We're reporters! Reporters!

POLICE OFFICER

On the floor!

Other cops run in, guns cocked and aimed. Lew sets the rifle down and he and Huffaker lay down, hands behind their heads. The cops run up and cuff them, they kick Huffaker's camera across the room and jam Lew's arm down -- FUCK!

INT. CONTROL ROOM

BROADCAST MONITOR: Trade Mart feed, Barker broadcasting -- a woman seen weeping down on the convention center floor drops to her knees. Men comfort her --

BARKER (ON TV)

-- the crowd now beginning to get up and leave --

His sound cuts off for a beat. Walter's voice comes in, but it's over the Trade Mart picture:

WALTER (V.O. ON TV)
That was Eddie Barker at our
affiliate KRLD in Dallas, Texas.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
This is Walter Cronkite back at the
CBS newsroom in New York.

Walter, back and broadcasting from his newsdesk. His audio
is solid but --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

-- on the BROADCAST MONITOR, the picture is still from the
Trade Mart. Techs scrambling to fix it at the console. With
Hewitt away from the room, Aubrey is running the show here --

JIM AUBREY
Get him on, dammit!

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
We have just been advised from
Dallas that blood transfusions are
being given to President Kennedy.
However, two priests have been
called for and have entered --

PICTURE on the MONITOR cuts back to Walter.

WALTER (CONT'D)
-- the emergency room at Parkland
Hospital where he rests after the
assassination attempt --

Walter takes off his reading glasses, looks at the clock on
the studio wall.

WALTER (CONT'D)
-- which now was about a half-
hour ago --
(glasses back on)
-- members of the White House Staff
have gathered in the waiting room
at Parkland Hospital, they're
standing around now waiting for --

A clerk hands him a note. Walter reads.

WALTER (CONT'D)

KRLD in Dallas got an audio tape, did an interview that is, with a man on Dealey Plaza. Let's listen to some of that interview --

Walter puts his glasses back on as the INTERVIEW AUDIO plays.

MAN ON STREET AUDIO (V.O.)

-- building, and as I told you earlier a youngster said that he saw a colored man fire three times from the window of that building --

Walter still visible on the air, reading wires, writing notes, listening to the audio, all at the same time.

MAN ON STREET AUDIO (V.O.)

-- people began to fall on the grass and run for bushes in a park area here, then police officers ran on the scene and there was a wild general search throughout this entire neighborhood -- apparently one of the officers found a small colored boy who said that he saw a man fire from about the fourth floor window of the school book depository building --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

CONSOLE TECH

Colored man fired or a colored boy saw a white man fire -- which one?

RALPH

Fuckin' Texas.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

In the studio Cronkite is visibly disregarding the report with a simple expression, it doesn't sound legit.

MAN ON STREET AUDIO (V.O.)

-- the fire department had earlier come upon the scene with gear --

Walter looks up at the studio lights. Glaring bright. Cameras thrumming. Wires conducting heat. He's starting to sweat.

A bead drips on his papers.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Aubrey looks closer into the monitor...

JIM AUBREY
He's sweating.

TECH
Gettin' hot in there. Lights never
been on this long before.

BOOM! One of the lights blows! Startles everyone in the studio like a gunshot. The tech looks back at Aubrey.

TECH (CONT'D)
Cameras neither.

Not good.

INT. PERRY MASON SET - SERVICE ELEVATOR

The service elevator dings open. The camera techs wheel the huge Perry Mason camera in. It almost tips over! FUCK!

They catch it! Whew... The elevator doors close.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

Betsy and the kids hurry inside. The TV is still running.

WALTER (ON TV)
-- as we go back to Eddie Barker at
the Trade Mart in Dallas --

Picture cuts back to the Trade Mart.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter, relieved by Barker.

He stands up from the chair. LIGHTING MEN run in to change the light and sweep up the broken glass. Assistants hurry in and set FANS on the floor pointing toward Walter's desk.

He's drenched in sweat as he walks out.

INT. CBS BREAK ROOM

Margaret fills a plastic bag with ice cubes from the freezer, ties it up, runs back to the studio and sets it on his chair.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - 2:25 P.M.

Walter walking in quickly --

WALTER

Bliss!

Ed Bliss comes over.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Need your shirt.

Walter undoes his tie and starts unbuttoning his sweaty shirt. Bliss too, when we hear a broadcast in the B.G. --

RADIO ANNOUNCER (FROM RADIO)

-- the president of the United States is dead.

Everyone stops in their tracks.

It's coming from a RADIO on a desk:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (FROM RADIO) (CONT'D)

John F. Kennedy has died of the wounds received in an assassination in Dallas less than an hour ago.

People gasp. News Editors freeze. A secretary covers her mouth. Everyone, in disbelief.

Walter still has his game face on.

WALTER

Don!

Hewitt hangs up his phone, comes out of his office.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (FROM RADIO)

-- we repeat, it has just been announced that President Kennedy is dead --

Walter looks to Don --

WALTER

Confirm that.

-- Don picks up a phone. Everyone focusing on the radio.

An awkward silence over the air waves. Then, an orchestral version of the Star Spangled Banner plays. But it plays at the WRONG SPEED. The sound bobs up and down, goes fast then slow. A complete joke. When it's finally done...

RADIO ANNOUNCER (FROM RADIO)
The, uh, Star Spangled Banner.
President John Kennedy is dead in
Dallas, Texas. He was shot by an
assassin's bullet less than an hour
ago and rushed to "Park Lane"
Hospital, uhh-eh, a tragic story
that has occurred in today's, uh,
American history--

WALTER
This has got to be a joke.

Aubrey storms in from the control room --

JIM AUBREY
Radio called it. Get in the chair.

WALTER
We're confirming.

Don's on the line trying to find out.

JIM AUBREY
They announced it. It's confirmed.

WALTER
That's not quite how it works.

JIM AUBREY
You're going to tell me how
television works?

WALTER
Not television. News.

JIM AUBREY
When Chet Huntley calls it on NBC
people are going to switch their
dials to him, you understand? Call
it now and keep your viewers.

WALTER
Not until we know more.

JIM AUBREY
Goddammit, Cronkite --

WALTER
The man didn't quote a source --

JIM AUBREY
-- 175 million people are watching
the news RIGHT NOW, biggest
television audience ever --

WALTER
-- nothing about how he found out,
who told him, when it happened --
he might as well have been blowing
hot air into the microphone --

JIM AUBREY
Finally, a topic you know something
about --

Don, getting word over the phone --

DON HEWITT
It's from a priest at Parkland.

JIM AUBREY
There you go. Confirmed.

WALTER
We need a name.

JIM AUBREY
Seriously?

DON HEWITT
No name, second-hand.

Walter looks at Aubrey --

WALTER
I'm not going with that.

JIM AUBREY
Who the hell are YOU to tell ME
what you're broadcasting on MY
network?

WALTER
When we get a solid source, I'll
report it.

JIM AUBREY
A goddamn priest isn't solid?

WALTER
Not when I don't know his name, or
if he was even with the president.

JIM AUBREY
We HAVE to be first with this.

WALTER
We have to be right.

A tense beat, Aubrey comes close.

JIM AUBREY
Who signs your paycheck?
(beat)
Remember your place, Walter, or I'll
be forced to remind you. You've got
two minutes to check your "sources."
After that, you ARE the source.

Aubrey walks away. Everyone, looking on silently.

WALTER
Get back to work!

The newsroom starts bustling again. Walter heads off to
Hewitt's office --

INT. HEWITT'S OFFICE

-- and he enters.

WALTER
Who'd you get -- Redmond?

DON HEWITT
Yeah.

Walter picks up Don's phone. Tries getting an outside line.

WALTER
Dammit.

Dials zero.

OPERATOR (ON PHONE)
CB--

WALTER
Arthur Redmond, White House.

As the phone rings, Don notices the stress in Walter's face.

Redmond picks up --

WALTER (CONT'D)

There's an unconfirmed report he's dead.

REDMOND (FROM PHONE)

Nobody's talking, Walter.

WALTER

Where's the Vice President?

REDMOND (FROM PHONE)

You know I can't tell you that.

MORT (O.S.)

Walter, Lew Wood on six!

WALTER

Big help, Art.
(switches lines)

Lew.

EXT. DEALEY PLAZA

Lew, on the payphone, collecting himself, looking back at the cops who just let him and Huffaker go.

LEW WOOD

Open window, shells, stacked boxes
concealing the Book Depository
window.

INT. HEWITT'S OFFICE

INTERCUTTING:

WALTER

What about the hil-- the, uh--

DON HEWITT

Knoll.

WALTER

The knoll.

LEW WOOD (FROM PHONE)

No shells yet, nothing. I don't
know though. It's a tough shot from
that window, Walter.

WALTER

Okay, keep digging.

LEW WOOD (FROM PHONE)
Is he still alive?

WALTER
We don't know.

Silence on the other end.

WALTER (CONT'D)
You focus, Lew. You hear me?

LEW WOOD (FROM PHONE)
Yes, sir.

WALTER
Go.

Lew hangs up.

MORT (O.S.)
Walter! We got Rather!

-- Walter walks out into the newsroom where Mort and several others are huddled around a speakerphone with Dan Rather on the other end --

MORT (CONT'D)
Say that again for Walter.

DAN RATHER (FROM PHONE)
I think he's dead.

WALTER
Why?

DAN RATHER (FROM PHONE)
Doctor and priest at Parkland.

WALTER
Names.

DAN RATHER (FROM PHONE)
Not sure, doctor wasn't authorized to talk, he hung up.

WALTER
Unconfirmed, unconfirmed, unconfirmed. This isn't a newspaper, people! There are no RETRACTIONS. The wrong story will END what little credibility we have.

Walter walks away to his office, Hewitt catching up with him.

DON HEWITT

We can report rumors, Walter, we just call them unconfirmed.

WALTER

We do that and we're gossip-mongers, nothing more.

DON HEWITT

NBC's going with it right now, ABC too -- everyone else is.

WALTER

And what happens when the rumors don't match up? When people don't know who to believe? One day it's cannibals in New Guinea, but the next it's the president of the United States and people are panicking, Don. They're asking us to come into their homes and tell them the truth for Christ's sake. It's not about NBC or ABC or CBS. It's bigger than that.

DON HEWITT

It's not just your job on the line here, you know.

Beat, Walter slows...

WALTER

You'll be fine.

(beat)

All these people will be fine.

DON HEWITT

How do you know?

WALTER

Because if the last 60 minutes have proven anything it's that television news has a future... But what kind of future? There is a hurricane of voices out there, all of them shouting something different. But you can't cheat the facts, Don. Either something's true, or it's a lie --

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

-- and if we get this story wrong, we're not only lying, we're handing a weapon to every enemy we've got: "They got that wrong, what else did they get wrong? How can we trust anything Cronkite says? Anything CBS says? Anything in the papers?" Truth loses its *definition*. And when that happens anyone can come along with any version of the truth they want, and we're powerless to call them out. It's how countries fall. People need a voice they can hear above the hurricane -- a voice they can trust.

DON HEWITT

They do... But it can't be you if you don't have a job.

(beat)

Do yourself a favor and call it. You did your best, Walter, and not a newsman in the world could blame you.

Hewitt, a hand on Walter's shoulder, and a look. He heads back out to the control room. Walter remains in his office.

He considers. Stress in his eyes. He looks out the door at everyone scrambling to get the story. Then to his desk, at the Rockefeller file from earlier. And finally, his eyes find that framed picture of his three kids.

He holds on it. He thinks.

Then, he glances up across the newsroom floor to the control room where he can make out techs cueing up FOOTAGE on the pre-broadcast monitors. And his expression changes.

WALTER

What the...

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Aubrey is supervising the techs as they load FOOTAGE of Kennedy's blood-stained limousine, bullet holes in the car seats, blood on the asphalt at Dealey, etc.

Walter approaches, looking at the gory footage. Broken glass. Blood. He can't believe his eyes.

WALTER

What is that?

JIM AUBREY
B-roll from Dallas.
(to the tech)
Put it up.

WALTER
Don't put it up.

JIM AUBREY
It was Don who told the guys to get
it, so don't act all high and
mighty here, Walter.

Walter looks at Don. It's true. A beat, as Walter considers...

WALTER
We're the same age.

JIM AUBREY
What?

Walter looks at the pre-broadcast monitor...

WALTER
Me and Jack. Born six months apart.
We both served in the war. Both
married. Both have children.
(re: the B-roll)
I can't imagine mine ever seeing
something like this.

JIM AUBREY
No one said it was pleasant. But
it's our job. Cue it.

WALTER
Don't cue it, Ralph.

JIM AUBREY
Cue the goddamn tape, Ralph!

WALTER
Get up out of the chair, Ralph.
RIGHT. NOW.

Tense beat. Ralph rises.

JIM AUBREY
Who in hell do you think you are?

WALTER

Let's dispense with the bullshit and get something straight. When you're on this floor, you're in my newsroom --

JIM AUBREY

I'm the president of this network!

WALTER

-- and I don't give a GOD DAMN what some top-floor socialite nepotist thinks passes for journalism. When you're on THIS floor, you don't get to decide that. So why don't you go back upstairs, worry about Ginger and Marianne, and let us worry about the news.

No one can believe what they're seeing.

Aubrey comes close...

JIM AUBREY

I'll have your goddamn job.

WALTER

You couldn't do my job.

Standoff.

Aubrey storms out.

Walter exhales. Holy shit. Looks back at Ralph --

WALTER (CONT'D)

Get rid of that crap.

Don looks at Walter. A guilty look on his face.

Walter heads back out, but --

DON HEWITT

You belong on the air, Walter.

Walter stops, holds. He still wants to chase this story.

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)

People are not going to remember where they were when Kennedy was shot. They're going to remember where they were when Walter Cronkite told them.

Walter looks at Don.

When Ralph cuts the feed of the B-roll, the pre-broadcast monitors display Walter's EMPTY CHAIR again.

It's waiting for him.

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)

Be the voice.

(beat)

Me and the guys, we'll get the story.

On Walter, a trusting look between him and Don...

CONSOLE TECH (PRE-LAP)

In five --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

CONSOLE TECH (V.O.)

-- four --

Walter walks in and sits on the bag of ice Margaret set down to keep him cool -- it's almost entirely melted -- he tosses it on the floor.

CONSOLE TECH (V.O.)

-- three --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

CONSOLE TECH

-- two --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO - 2:30 P.M.

The cameraman points at Walter --

WALTER

That was Eddie Barker at our affiliate KRLD in Dallas, Texas speaking from the room where President Kennedy had been scheduled to make an address to three Dallas organizations, but an assassin's bullets cut him down on the way to that meeting from the airport. It has been one hour since that electrifying flash came over the wires.

CAMERAMEN and SOUND MEN are stripped down half-naked now, sweating from the heat. Cameras straining. Lights blaring.

WALTER (ON TV) (CONT'D)
Here is what we know.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Aubrey walks in and picks up a phone.

JIM AUBREY
 Get me Mr. Paley.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
 President Kennedy arrived at Dallas Airport this morning from Fort Worth, Texas. It was the third stop on his swing of Texas that began yesterday. A swing that up to then had been wildly greeted by thousands of Texans --

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Aubrey notices the other TVs in the newsroom. The one showing the ABC broadcast cuts from the anchors to a PLACARD:

ABC NEWS

**JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY
 1917-1963**

PUSH IN on Aubrey...

JIM AUBREY
 (on the phone)
 I think we need to pull him.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
 -- as his car approached a railroad underpass, three shots were heard to ring out.
 (MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)
 Mrs. Kennedy was heard by reporters nearby to scream "Oh, no." After that shooting incident, of course, pandemonium broke out --

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Aubrey hangs up with Paley.

JIM AUBREY
 Where's that other son of a bitch?

NEWS EDITOR
 Who?

JIM AUBREY
 Him!

Aubrey points to Collingwood.

JIM AUBREY (CONT'D)
 Tighten your goddamn necktie.

Collingwood, a deer in the headlights, looks at Aubrey who's already walking back to the studio --

JIM AUBREY (CONT'D)
 Hurry your ass up!

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO - 2:32 P.M.

As Walter broadcasts, the main CAMERA starts SPUTTERING. The vacuum tubes, browning in and out. Overheating.

WALTER
 -- pints of blood had been rushed into the room for transfusion purposes and two priests were called to the room --

Outside the CONTROL ROOM, Walter spots a WOMAN applying make-up to Charles Collingwood as he puts on his blazer and tidies his hair.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt sees Collingwood prepping, and he looks to Aubrey.

DON HEWITT
 What are you doing?

JIM AUBREY

Cut back to Dallas so we can switch them out.

Hewitt holds, but their attention is drawn away by Walter:

WALTER (ON TV)

-- that the president is dead, but that has NOT been confirmed by any other source. As late as fifteen minutes ago it was reported by aides outside in the corridor that he was still alive. The extent of his injuries, whether they are indeed critical or not, is not known either --

Aubrey looks back at Hewitt, undeterred.

JIM AUBREY

Cut away.

The tech lifts his finger to switch back to the Trade Mart.

It hovers over the button, waiting for Hewitt's go-ahead.

Hewitt steels himself, looks back at Aubrey:

DON HEWITT

No.

JIM AUBREY

You don't have the leverage Cronkite does, Don. Don't throw your career away.

Hewitt regards Walter continuing the broadcast, then back:

DON HEWITT

He stays on.

Aubrey turns to the tech...

JIM AUBREY

Do it.

But the tech withdraws his hand, stands and stares Aubrey down. Ralph rises, too. And Mort. Everyone in the room is prepared to walk right now if Walter is replaced.

Aubrey can't believe his eyes.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter, continuing his broadcast, glances in the control room where he sees them all facing off, and... Aubrey walking out.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt hits the talk-back to the CAMERAMAN in the studio:

DON HEWITT
Keep that thing alive.

INT. CBS NEWS CORRIDORS

The camera techs wheel the Perry Mason camera down the hall -- and they KNOCK Aubrey down as he tries to pass!

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt conducting the broadcast and working the story --

DON HEWITT
Get an E.R. doctor to go on the
damn record already.

-- Mort picks up a phone and dials.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - 2:34 P.M.

THE U.P.I. TELETYPE: punching out a new wire.

Bliss rips it off and runs.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter, handed the wire --

WALTER
Further information here. The
Catholic priest who helped perform
the last rites, Father Huber, in
Dallas, said that he did not
believe the president was dead at
that time. There has been --
just a moment --

Another WIRE handed to Walter.

Everyone in the control room and studio watches anxiously. They're paying attention to him now as he's handed a note or printout -- they're curious, becoming viewers themselves.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

Betsy and the kids watch, leaning in. Walter, still absorbing the wire transmission. She clenches her kids' hands.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

He looks back at CAMERA...

WALTER

That information did not bear directly on the condition of President Kennedy. It has come from Kansas City, Missouri, where our affiliate KCMO says that Mrs. Bess Truman has told KCMO that former President Truman is too upset to comment on today's tragic developments.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

Betsy lets out a sigh of relief. There's still hope.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter, continuing...

WALTER

There has been no word at all on the -- official word -- from the doctors at Parkland Hospital or the White House staff on the extent of the President's wounds.

Another wire, Walter continues speaking as he reads it.

WALTER (CONT'D)

It is believed...

(reading)

...that a gap in the motorcade perhaps saved Vice President Johnson from being a target of the assassin today. The gap had opened up in the motorcade just before the assassin's bullets rang out --

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

TELETYPE punching another wire out.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Margaret runs in and hands it to Walter --

INT. CRONKITE HOME

And he reports it on TV --

WALTER (ON TV)

The priests who were with Kennedy --
the two priests who were with
Kennedy -- say that he is dead of
his bullet wounds.

Betsy's face falls. The kids, jaws trembling.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER

-- the bulletin that has just
cleared from Dallas, that the two
priests who were in the emergency
room where President Kennedy lay
after being taken from the Dallas
streetcorner where he was shot say
that he is dead --

INT. DINER

People watching, rapt in attention. On the TV, Mort's hand
can be seen entering frame, pointing at Walter's desk:

MORT (FROM TV)

There's a picture, under there,
right there.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter looks through the wires, finds it.

WALTER

Another picture, taken just moments
-- just moments, split moments --
before the assassination attempt,
is here.

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

Let's see if we can get a real close-up of that picture, it has just arrived. It shows a smiling Mrs. Kennedy and the president in the front seat of th-- in the back seat of the car--

INT. CRONKITE HOME

-- Betsy, hand over her mouth, still awaiting official word. Still hoping the latest report is wrong --

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Techs in the control room also hanging on, hoping.

BROADCAST MONITOR extreme close-up on Walter's face as he puts the photo down and the camera slowly zooms back out.

WALTER (ON TV)

As we reported to you, the New York Stock Exchange has closed, as a nation, if these reports are true, prepares to go into mourning.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Another wire, punching out --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO - 2:36 P.M.

-- again handed to Walter.

WALTER

Now from Washington, government sources say that President Kennedy is dead. Those are "government sources," still not an official announcement.

Margaret watching from the sidelines. Tears start streaming down her face as she hangs onto Walter's every last word.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

Betsy is more and more deflated with every update. As if the game clock is ticking down and she feels the loss coming, but there's still that Hail Mary glimmer of hope. Still hope...

WALTER (ON TV)
A television newsman --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
-- said that he looked up just after the shot was fired and saw a rifle being withdrawn from a fifth or sixth floor window of a nearby building -- said a policeman fell to the ground, pulled his pistol, and yelled "get down," probably to attempt to return the shots.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Aubrey, arms crossed, watching Cronkite on the TV. He's antsy, waiting for Walter to make it official --

PRODUCER
It's ready, sir.

It's their own "J.F.K. 1917-1963" photo placard.

JIM AUBREY
Cue it up.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
Mrs. Kennedy, very attractive in a pale beige dress and a pillbox hat, had gotten a standing ovation from that crowd, and proved to be quite a campaigner in Texas in these last two days and was getting a lot of plaudits from the old political pros for that.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

Betsy and the kids -- all glued to the TV.

WALTER (ON TV)
President Kennedy himself rose rather early and addressed informally a rather large crowd of people --
(MORE)

WALTER (ON TV) (CONT'D)
 -- and had pleased them with his quips about the fact that he was sorry that he could not bring Mrs. Kennedy with him down to that particular meeting, but that it took her a little longer to get organized than it did him, but as he said, "it's worth it," and the crowd laughed and applauded and enjoyed the quip.

Walter, somehow finding a sad smile with this recollection.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER
 At the airport in Dallas, the -- and throughout the streets of Dallas -- the Dallas Police had been augmented by some 400 policemen called in on their day off because there were some fears and concerns in Dallas that there might be demonstrations, at least, that could embarrass the president.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

ANOTHER WIRE PUNCHING OUT. Frantic keys hitting the paper, slamming black ink into the pulp as it stutters out.

The paper is RIPPED AWAY.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter's broadcast, continuing.

CUT TO WALTER'S POV: all sound drowns out.

We look up and find Mort approaching, handing him the latest wire. Walter puts on his glasses, reads it to himself.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt leans in. Everyone, waiting.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

Betsy, jaw tight. Her kids, edge of the couch.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO - 2:38 P.M.

Walter looks up.

SLO-MO, as we see the studio from HIS PERSPECTIVE:

The lights, the heat, the cameramen and sound men. The techs. Margaret. The editors. And through the glass to the control room: Hewitt, Mort, Bliss, Collingwood, the console techs.

All of them watching him. All of them waiting.

WALTER

From Dallas Texas, the flash
apparently official, President
Kennedy died at 1 P.M. Central
Standard Time --

He takes off his glasses, looks at the clock.

WALTER (CONT'D)

-- two o'clock, Eastern Standard
Time, some 38 minutes ago.

He puts his glasses back on, and for the very first time...

A BEAT.

His confident exterior melts. The race is over. His eyes dampen. Throat chokes up as he absorbs what's just happened.

WALTER (CONT'D)

(voice breaking)

Vice President Johnson, has left
the hospital, in Dallas, but we do
not know to where he has proceeded.
Presumably he will be taking the
oath of office shortly, and become
the 36th President of the United
States.

Walter looks down at his papers. He's lost. Rudderless.

CAMERAS STILL THRUMMING. LIGHTS STILL SHINING.

Faces, all still looking to him. Waiting for his next words. They all need him to guide them through this.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

PUSH IN slowly on Chip watching the television.

Listening. Waiting. He needs his dad to go on.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Walter collects himself.

WALTER

President Kennedy at Dallas Airport this morning was cheerful, and waving. It had been quite a triumphal tour of Texas over the last 48 hours. There were hundreds of people crowded around the president at the airport, wildly cheering.

Another wire is brought in and handed to Walter. He reads.

WALTER (CONT'D)

We're beginning to hear now from points around the world, of course, in a succession of messages that will be coming in.

Walter looks through more photos on his desk --

WALTER (CONT'D)

Here are some pictures taken of President Kennedy earlier today. A picture of the president and Mrs. Kennedy at that Chamber of Commerce breakfast at Fort Worth about which I was telling you.

Beat, as CAMERA explores the photo. Jackie smiling and speaking. JFK looking at her, smiling and applauding her.

WALTER (CONT'D)

The President seems to be applauding Mrs. Kennedy as he had been doing for two days, because she was making a big hit in Texas.

He looks through more photographs. Almost as if looking through a photo album of old friends, as if reminiscing...

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt, his muscles finally limbering after the tension, goes on this ride through the photos, the memories, with Walter.

We all do...

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

WALTER

Here he is greeting that crowd in the parking lot of Fort Worth, I told you -- before the Chamber of Commerce breakfast -- the crowd to which he said he was sorry Mrs. Kennedy couldn't address or be with, but it took her longer to get organized in the morning than him. But, as he said, it's worth it.

Margaret looking on, teary-eyed. She smiles. Everyone in here and everyone at home, they're comforted by Walter.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

Betsy holds her children a little closer as they watch.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hewitt wipes his eyes, turns to notice Collingwood ready to go at any time, and he signals Walter --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

-- Walter sees Collingwood waiting patiently in the wings, this time to give him a much-needed break. Walter nods.

WALTER

We're going to keep you advised of details as they come in here to our newsdesk in New York.

He sets the photos down, looks back at the camera.

WALTER (CONT'D)

President Kennedy is dead of an assassin's bullet in the 46th year of his life. This is Walter Cronkite at our CBS newsroom in New York. Now Charles Collingwood is standing by. Charles will sit in here to keep you advised of further details as this tragic day goes on.

Walter gets up from his chair.

Collingwood approaches, sits and adjusts the microphone on the desk and begins broadcasting.

Walter walks out of the studio.

INT. CBS NEWS CORRIDORS

He approaches Don just outside the control room.

A silent look between colleagues. Don lifts a hand to shake Walter's. Walter shakes it, tight.

Thankful looks from both of them.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Walter enters the newsroom. Collecting himself as best he can. From his POV, we see all the reporters and editors, secretaries and techs still working to gather information.

They stop, one by one, what they're doing, and look at Walter as he walks past. Sadness in their eyes. Tears, anxiety, fear. When they notice him, though, their expressions change ever so slightly, and we see something else in their eyes:

Gratitude.

They nod their solemn thanks as he passes. And he, to them.

He walks into his office and closes the door.

INT. WALTER'S OFFICE

He rests his forehead against the door.

And he cries.

After a moment, he collects himself. Walks to his telephone. Blinking with lights. He picks up. Finds an open line and dials nine. A dial tone comes through.

Finally.

INT. CRONKITE HOME

The phone rings. Betsy and the kids run to it. She picks up.

BETSY CRONKITE

Walter?

But he can't answer. He's choked up. Trying to hold back his crying. On the other end, Betsy, the same.

BETSY CRONKITE (CONT'D)

Oh, Walter.

He wipes the tears from his face. Voice breaking.

WALTER

I love you, Betsy.

(beat)

Tell the kids... I love them, too.

BETSY CRONKITE

I will.

WALTER

Tell them... everything's going to be alright.

She smiles, cries.

They both listen to the silence. To each other breathe.

Finally for Walter, a moment of comfort.

Of rest.

Then, a KNOCK on his office door:

DON HEWITT (O.S.)

Walter.

He turns to see Don.

DON HEWITT (CONT'D)

Dallas police just made an arrest.

Walter nods at Don, who retreats back out to the newsroom. A deep breath, Walter finding his composure.

WALTER

Betsy, I...

BETSY CRONKITE

Go. Get back to work.

He smiles. She does too.

WALTER

I'll see you soon.

He smiles, hangs up. He wipes his tears away.

Looks at that old FRAMED BYLINE on his wall for a beat.

He gets back in gear, and heads out to the newsroom.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR

Jim Aubrey is sitting by himself, deep in thought -- in mourning, just like everyone else.

A HAND

on Aubrey's shoulder. Aubrey looks up. It's Walter.

WALTER

You okay?

JIM AUBREY

(genuinely)

Yeah... Thanks.

Walter nods.

JIM AUBREY (CONT'D)

NBC beat us. Should have called it.

WALTER

People can say we were late. But they can't say we were wrong.

Aubrey understands. Walter walks away.

We PULL BACK to take in the bustling newsroom. Walter heads back to Don, to get the latest from his staff as they continue to follow the story.

To follow the truth.

WALTER (V.O.)

Today was a day that will live in memory and in grief...

I/E. VARIOUS

As we hear the following V.O., we track the people we've met throughout the day as they take quiet moments to themselves. Crying. Working. Hugging their loved ones later at night.

WALTER (V.O.)

Only history can write the importance of this day...

Margaret. Mort. Ralph. Hewitt at his office window, looking out at Manhattan. Dan Rather sitting on the grassy knoll at dusk, police lights still flickering, in deep contemplation.

WALTER (V.O.)
Tonight there will be few Americans
who will go to bed without carrying
with them the sense that somehow
they have failed...

INT. CRONKITE HOME - NIGHT

And Walter, finally getting home late at night. Betsy and the kids wake from the living room couch. TV still on.

WALTER (V.O.)
If in the search of our conscience we
find a new dedication to the American
concepts that brook no political,
sectional, religious or racial
divisions, then maybe it may yet be
possible to say that John Fitzgerald
Kennedy did not die in vain...

The family hugs in silence. A deep, long-awaited hug.

Walter closes his eyes.

And we return to --

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO - DAY

-- the studio newsdesk, Walter looking right into camera:

WALTER
That's the way it is, November 22nd,
1963. I'm Walter Cronkite. Goodnight.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END