

59

LOU GRANT

"POISON"

PROD #7521

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by

Michele
Gallery

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FIRST DRAFT

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"Poison"

CAST

LOU GRANT.....EDWARD ASNER
CHARLIE HUME.....MASON ADAMS
JOE ROSSI.....ROBERT WALDEN
BILLIE NEWMAN.....LINDA KELSEY
ART DONOVAN.....JACK BANNON
ANIMAL.....DARYL ANDERSON
CAROL.....
SAM BEECHER.....
SHERIFF TURNER.....
HOWARD RINDELL.....
ATTENDANT.....
STRANGER.....
BOB PHELPS.....
MRS. PRATT.....
DR. ROBERTA GIANNI.....
WORKER ONE.....
WORKER TWO.....
WORKER THREE.....
NATIONAL EDITOR.....
WILSON.....
JAYSON.....
COPYBOY.....

"Poison"

SETS

EXTERIOR SETS:

FRONTIER TOWN
STREET
PHONEBOOTH
MOTEL ROOM

INTERIOR SETS:

PORTRAIT STUDIO
CAROL'S APARTMENT
McKENNA'S
MOTEL ROOM
POLICE STATION
PARKING STRUCTURE
LOU'S HOME
BILLIE'S BEDROOM
CITY ROOM
PRATT LIVING ROOM
INDUSTRIAL DOCTOR'S OFFICE
COCKTAIL LOUNGE
HOSPITAL CORRIDOR
HOSPITAL ROOM
CONFERENCE ROOM
STAIRWELL-FORUM

"Poison"

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

1. INT. PORTRAIT STUDIO - DAY

1.

We fade in on a close-up of a pioneer couple, a wedding portrait. The bride and groom are both about thirty, and, in western tradition, they are deadpan. They stand side-by-side. In the second picture, the bride is seated, and her husband stands behind her, one hand on her shoulder. In the third picture, however, they are joined by a cowboy, who stands on the other side of the bride in a mirror image pose of the groom. In picture four, the bride and groom are staring at him: "Who is he?", while our cowboy looks at the camera, grinning. The final picture is the cowboy with the bride bent back in his arms, giving her a great big gag kiss while the groom howls in the background. WE recognize the cowboy, it's ROSSI, but we've never seen him this way. What is going on here?

CUT TO:

2. EXT. FRONTIER TOWN - DAY

2.

The place is a cheapo shopping center made to look like a western town. Rossi and his friend, SAM BEECHER, and Sam's fiancée CAROL (the bride and groom in the pictures) leave an old-fashioned portrait studio.

2A. EXT. FRONTIER TOWN - DAY

2A.

Later, the threesome mosey along, eating frozen yogurt. Carol is sifting through the photos. All three are dressed in normal clothes, very casually. Sam wears a western shirt and a stetson. This is his uniform. All three are having a great, easy time.

CAROL

Terrific idea for our wedding portrait, Joe. I wish I could use the dress for the ceremony.

SAM

Great place, pal.

ROSSI

Didn't I tell you? Real western atmosphere.

SAM

(to Carol)

He's kidding. Deep in his heart he knows that real ghost towns don't sell frozen yogurt.

CONTINUED

2A CONTINUED

2A

CAROL

Joe, come with us next time we camp out on the desert. I think you'd like it.

ROSSI

Are you kidding? Eech, all those bugs...crawly things.

SAM

(what a chicken)

Oh, wow.

ROSSI

And anyway, I've never understood your obsession with the old west, all this cowboy business.

SAM

(the obvious explanation)

Well, I'm from Burbank.

ROSSI

Sam, I'm from Burbank. But how come I'm James Cagney and you end up the Cisco Kid?

SAM

You expect a joke, but I'll give you a serious answer.

(he's given this a lot of thought)

I think it has something to do with going back to a time when you could tell the good guys from the bad guys. And when you counted on tomorrow being better than today.

Rossi wasn't expecting this.

ROSSI

Oh.

The three of them walk in silence for a beat.

CAROL

Don't believe a word of it. He thinks western shirts make his shoulders look broader.

Sam clamps his arm lovingly around her, she kisses his cheek. Rossi enjoys it.

CUT TO:

3. INT. CAROL'S APARTMENT - DAY

3.

It is a tidy but too-small studio, with a kitchen offstage. There is one entire wall of books, and, nearby, a no-nonsense steel desk with two-drawer file. In another portion of the room is a small dining table, which for the moment has on it a typewriter, three or four books, a great deal of paper, and a coffee mug. Carol has just opened the door, and her cat slips outside.

CAROL

(to the cat)

Shane, didn't I let you out when we left?

Carol enters, and Sam and Rossi follow.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Listen, I'll heat up the pizza, you guys set the table.

Carol goes into the kitchen. Rossi and Sam start to clear off the table.

ROSSI

This your work?

SAM

Nope. When I come to L.A. for a weekend, I try to leave NUKCON behind me. Looks like Carol's got a paper due.

(reading)

"Effectiveness Study of Low Level Radiation Testing."

(proud)

That's my darlin'.

Carol re-enters and places two open bottles of beer on the table, kisses Sam and heads back into the kitchen. Rossi sits, folding the napkins as Sam sets the table. Rossi is impressed.

ROSSI

Isn't this great? Here we are, still young enough to be hell-raisers, but old enough to have paid some of our dues. You've got a terrific woman you love, I'm... uh...still maintaining my high standards -- The three of us have just had a great afternoon, we're drinking beer, gonna have a pizza... Yep. What a life.

There is a shared silence for a beat.

CONTINUED

3. CONTINUED

3.

SAM

Joe?

ROSSI

Yeah?

SAM

I'm scared out of my skull.

ROSSI

What about?

SAM

Maybe it's working in the nuclear industry. It doesn't take much to get a guy edgy. At my plant, I've picked up on carelessness, sloppy work. It's not safe there.

ROSSI

That's scary all right.

SAM

That's not the only thing that scares me. See, they've got me pegged as a troublemaker at NUKCON. I get the feeling they're keeping an eye on me.

(thinks about it)

They should, too. I am out to get the goods on them.

ROSSI

Let me use a scientific term on you.

SAM

What is it?

ROSSI

Paranoia. A little harsh, pal, but it applies.

SAM

You just don't know.

Carol enters.

CAROL

Were either of you guys in the kitchen earlier today?

ROSSI

No.

CONTINUED

3. CONTINUED

3.

SAM

Uh-uh.

CAROL

(carefully choosing her words)

Okay. I think someone was. They went through the cupboards and the drawers.

ROSSI

How do you know?

CAROL

I wish I didn't have to admit this, but I love my kitchen. I know every inch of it. And things aren't where they were. Everything is very tidy, but out of place.

She starts looking around the room.

SAM

Listen, I'm a very jumpy person right now. Don't aggravate it.

ROSSI

Take it easy. That's not enough to go on.

CAROL

Check my file drawer, will you?

SAM

It's okay. It's locked.

CAROL

(increasingly miserable)

No! I was using it all morning on my paper. I left it open.

SAM

(suddenly)

Shane.

ROSSI

What?

CAROL

The cat.

(realizing)

That's right. I thought I left him out, but he was in when we got back.

CONTINUED

3. CONTINUED

3.

SAM

You did let him out, hon. He came back in with whoever was here.

Carol sits down, really jangled by this. Sam crosses to the window, looks out, sees nothing.

CAROL

I almost wish they'd ransacked the place. This is so spooky.

ROSSI

Listen, it could be nothing. Maybe it was just a burglary.

CAROL

(a shudder)

Wouldn't that be nice?

SAM

Don't they usually take things in a burglary?

ROSSI

(realizing)

Oh, wow.

Carol has moved to the door and locked it.

CAROL

(to the guys)

I know, I know. But we have to do something.

ROSSI

Call the cops.

SAM

For what? Breaking and cleaning.

The three of them stand in silence, stumped.

ROSSI

Well, I know what I'm going to do.

SAM

What's that?

ROSSI

First thing in the morning I'm pitching your story to my editor.

CUT TO:

4. INT. MCKENNA'S - DAY

4.

Lou and Rossi are listening to Sam discuss working conditions at NUKCON. They are seated at a booth, drinking.

SAM

I'm talking about a chemical plant where radioactive liquids are leaking out of pipes. And buckets put down to keep the stuff off the floor.

(shaking his head)

Open buckets.

LOU

You got pictures of that?

SAM

No, but I saw it.

LOU

Uh-huh.

ROSSI

Tell him about the boots.

LOU

What's that?

SAM

The crew is issued work clothes, you know, which they're supposed to keep at the plant so they don't contaminate anything when they leave.

LOU

Right.

SAM

Well, part of the uniform is boots, and as a precaution they mixed up this special yellow paint and painted the toes before handing them out.

ROSSI

So the guards'll know if they try to wear the boots home.

LOU

Isn't that kind of precaution common in the nuclear industry? It's good they're cautious.

CONTINUED

4. CONTINUED

4.

SAM

I'm saying they're not cautious enough. The crew really likes those boots, and it's a hassle to change, so they fooled around with some solvents to take the yellow paint off. Those boots are tracking stuff all over town.

LOU

(genuinely concerned)

Like radiation.

SAM

Sometimes. See, you set up safeguards. But there always seems to be a way around them. You know about Murphy's Law?

LOU

Anything that can go wrong, will.

SAM

That's it. Well, Murphy's Law is kind of the watchword of the nuclear industry, too. But even with all the caution, incidents happen all the time.

ROSSI

"Incident." Even you're doing it, Sam.

SAM

(caught)

Everyone who remembers Hiroshima knows how powerful the atom is. So they use these reassuring terms: they call accidents 'incidents', explosions become 'energy releases'. 'Rapid critical assembly' is a pretty pale term for what is potentially an atomic bomb.

LOU

Listen, Sam, I can tell you know what you're talking about; still, you seem kind of hostile toward your industry.

SAM

Lou, ever since they had me read "Our Buddy the Atom" in fourth grade, I've been studying nuclear power. I'm
(MORE)

CONTINUED

4. CONTINUED

4.

SAM (CONT'D)

committed to it. But if we don't do it a hundred percent right, it's not going to be worth it. I'm an optimist. I think if we can figure out how to split the atom, we oughtta be able to figure out how to protect ourselves from its power.

LOU

What about the government? Have you gone to them for help?

SAM

Sure I have. The only person who'll return my phone calls is Bob Phelps, the congressman from a district around here.

LOU

Have you gone to Washington to see him?

SAM

I'm trying to keep a low profile.

ROSSI

Must be tough in that hat.

SAM

(after glancing at Rossi)
Still, he's promised to let me see him when he's in town. But I don't want to wait for him. If the Trib is interested, I'd sure like you guys to have it.

ROSSI

Are we interested, Lou?

LOU

If we have some evidence we are.

SAM

You mean like company records?

LOU

Yeah, records, interoffice memos, photographs...something tangible for the charges we're gonna make. You willing to try to get that for us?

CONTINUED

4. CONTINUED

4.

SAM
(after a short beat)
You bet. How much time have I
got?

LOU
Take all the time you need. I
have a feeling this is a story
that isn't going to go away.

CUT TO:

5. INT. CAROL'S APARTMENT - DAY

5.

Sam is bundling his stuff into a leather carry-all.
Throughout, Carol canvasses the room, collecting what
he has forgotten.

SAM
(excited)
I didn't even get a chance to
tell them about most of it. Joe's
editor just said, "Get going."
He wants evidence. Now maybe
we'll get somewhere.

CAROL
(tossing him a brown
plastic bottle)
Vitamin C's...

SAM
Oh, yeah.
(realizing)
I hate leaving you here alone.

CAROL
Don't worry about me. Whoever
broke in is going to be trailing
after you all the way back to Las
Tunas.

SAM
You're right. Me and my shadow.
(musing)
Maybe we'll finally get to the
point where we can carpool.

CAROL
(laughing in spite of
herself)
Sam, will you please be serious --

CONTINUED

5. CONTINUED

5.

SAM

Well, it's such a waste of gas.
As a member of the energy industry,
I kind of feel an obligation....

CAROL

This is not a million laughs,
honey.

(hanging him a shirt)

Here.

(thoughtful)

What're you going to do afterwards?

SAM

(surprised)

Wow. I never thought about it
before.

(recovering)

Of course, with my background
and all, the years of study, it
shouldn't be too hard to find
something to suit my abilities.
Gunslinger...

(he shoots from the hip)

Kapow! Cattle rustler. What the
heck, robber baron. You'll love
me in muttonchops.

CAROL

(serious)

I'll even love you if you decide
against taking on that entire company
on your own.

SAM

(zipping up bag)

Not a chance. This is going to be
fun.

CAROL

(she's got to say it)

Sam, don't go.

SAM

(he's got to say it)

Carol, don't worry. Now we've both
fulfilled our obligations.

He crosses to her, holds and kisses her.

SAM (CONT'D)

(serious)

Darlin' companion.

CONTINUED

5. CONTINUED

5.

Carol kisses him.

CAROL
Darlin' companion.

He goes to the door, opens it. Carol spots his hat across the room, runs to it, tosses it to Sam.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Hat!

SAM
(catching it)
Got it. Bye.

Sam plants his hat on at a rakish angle, takes a last look at Carol, and goes out the door.

CUT TO:

6. INT. HUME'S OFFICE - DAY

6.

Hume and Lou are waiting for a prearranged call from Sam.

LOU
I hope you don't mind Rossi giving Sam Beecher your private number. He's spooked about people listening in.

HUME
That's why it's a private number. You sure of this fellow's credentials? I don't want us shilling for the anti-nuke people.

LOU
As far as I can tell, the kid's really committed to nuclear energy. He's just interested in safe conditions where he works.

Rossi enters, harried.

ROSSI
Am I late?

LOU
No. Nothing yet.

ROSSI
Our stupid librarian couldn't find the file on plutonium. Turns out he had it under platinum.

CONTINUED

6. CONTINUED

6.

The phone rings, Hume answers.

HUME

Charles Hume.

INTERCUT WITH:

7. INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

7.

Sam Beecher is sitting on the edge of a bed, talking on the phone. He is dressed to go out, in a ratty old sheepskin jacket. His hat is at his side.

SAM

Hello, Mr. Hume. This is Sam Beecher. Is Joe Rossi there?

HUME

Yes, Mr. Beecher. I'm going to put you on conference call. Lou Grant and Rossi are both here.

Hume puts the call on conference.

ROSSI

Hi, Sam. What've you got?

SAM

Hey, Joe. Listen, this is bigger than I thought. Can you come out to see me?

ROSSI

(a look at Lou)

Las Tunas? Sure.

SAM

No, no. I'm just across the California state line, at the Wagon Wheel Motel on Highway 9. How soon can you make it?

ROSSI

Six tonight?

SAM

Swell. Hey, Carol was going to come up for the weekend. Can she come along with you?

ROSSI

Sure, I'll swing by and pick her up.

CONTINUED

7. CONTINUED

7.

SAM

Thanks. Lou, you still there?

LOU

Yeah. What is it, Sam?

SAM

(with a white business envelope in his hand)

I've got what you asked for. Records, photographs. You won't be sorry.

LOU

Terrific. Now relax. Rossi's on his way.

SAM

That's what I intend to do.
(he puts envelope in his pocket)

Gonna buy myself a beer and send the Trib the bill.

LOU

We'll even cover you for a pickled egg.

SAM

(laughing)

Okay. See you at six, Joe.

ROSSI

Right, pal.

Hume clicks off. Rossi looks at his bosses.

ROSSI (CONT'D)

Here we go.

CUT TO:

8. EXT. STREET - NIGHT

8.

We are in a city like King City: a one-street town which used to be on the state highway, but has fallen into disuse since the superhighways were built. Cars are parked on both sides of the street, and there is very little traffic now that the stores have closed for the day. Sam opens the door of an old neighborhood tavern mid-block. He takes a deep breath of the fresh air, and starts to put his sheepskin coat and stetson hat on. He is relaxed, but gives no indication of being drunk. Before he buttons the coat, he checks the right-side pocket for the envelope he's bringing

CONTINUED

8. CONTINUED

8.

Rossi. It's still there, and we can see the tip of it sticking out of the pocket. Sam heads for his car, walks between two parked cars and out into the middle of the street. Suddenly he becomes aware of headlights fast approaching. In the bright white light we see Sam instantly aware of his situation: He's never going to keep that appointment with Rossi and Carol.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

9. INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

9.

The same room Sam was in. On the wall is a coffeemaker, with a pyrex pot. Rossi and Carol are sitting on the edge of the beds, waiting. It is clear they've been waiting a long time. A newspaper is scattered over Carol's bed. Rossi's got the pillows taken out from under his bedspread. Rossi is on the phone, hanging up. The yellow pages are open on Carol's lap.

ROSSI

Nope.

CAROL

Not even married yet, and I'm checking the bars for him.

ROSSI

Give me the next one.

CAROL

Okay...Wendell's Bar and Grill...
645...

Rossi starts dialing, stops.

ROSSI

Look, why don't we call the cops?

Carol rises, crosses to coffeemaker.

CAROL

Cops, come on. What could happen
in a town this size?

ROSSI

You know Sam. Maybe he had to shoot
it out with the local hired gun.

CAROL

(giving it some thought)
Well, I guess it couldn't hurt to call.
(inspecting the coffeepot)
Yeech, gotta wash this. Want coffee?

ROSSI

(looking up number in
front of phone book)
Sure.

CONTINUED

9. CONTINUED

9.

ROSSI (CONT'D)

(he dials, into phone)

Hello, officer. My name is Joe Rossi. We've been waiting for a friend, and he's very late. We thought maybe you could tell us if there'd been any accidents or anything in the past few hours... uh-huh. Do you have an identification? ...Well, if I give you his name, would you confirm it?...Sam Beecher. He's from Las Tunas...

(beat)

What kind of accident?

Hearing the word, Carol re-enters the room. Quickly she swings into action, pulling on her coat, getting the room key, her purse, Rossi's coat.

ROSSI (CONT'D)

(stunned and very quiet)

Okay, sure. We'll be right down. ...Where is it?...Right away.

He hangs up.

CAROL

I hope they haven't given him any medication. Sam's allergic to penicillin, and he never wears the little ID bracelet I gave him --

For the first time, Carol sees Rossi's face.

CAROL (CONT'D)

(realizing)

No. No, no. God, no.

And on Rossi's sad acknowledgement that Sam is dead, we

CUT TO:

10. INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

This is a small operation, not a big city police precinct. In addition to the Desk, there are a number of smaller desks, and several wooden chairs for people waiting. Rossi and Carol are with the officer in charge, SHERIFF TURNER. Turner is a patient man, and gives Rossi and same even-handed treatment he gives everyone. He is used to dealing with people under stress.

CONTINUED

10. CONTINUED

10.

ROSSI

(really hot)

What do you mean, you're not going to hold the guy? He's killed my best friend. Did you people test him? Did you bother to see if he'd been drinking?

TURNER

Yes, we did. He hadn't. But according to some people in the bar, Mr. Beecher had...I'm not saying he was intoxicated, but it is possible his reflexes had been slowed by alcohol...

ROSSI

I can't believe this. You're talking like he had it coming.

TURNER

Mr. Rossi, you've just suffered a tremendous loss. I'm sorry. I wish it hadn't happened. But the facts are that Mr. Rindell was traveling within the speed limits, that he hadn't been drinking, that your friend had, that he was crossing in the middle of the block. From our point of view, it was an accident, and we don't intend to charge the driver.

ROSSI

What if it wasn't an accident?

TURNER

How's that?

ROSSI

This man was bringing me some information. Some very damaging information. This wasn't just some local yahoo jaywalking.

TURNER

(patiently)

Mr. Rindell was just passing through town on his way from Ohio to L.A.

ROSSI

Where in Ohio?

TURNER

(referring to paper)

Sandusky.

CONTINUED

10. CONTINUED

10.

CAROL

(to Rossi)

Please, let it be.

ROSSI

I just want Officer Turner to be aware that he may have a murderer in custody.

At this point, a hallway door opens, and a younger cop leads a very disturbed man into the room. It is HOWARD RINDELL, the man who ran down Sam. He is not what Rossi expected: an ordinary-looking guy, about forty-five, and he is as shaken and remorseful as any of us would be if we'd just killed someone and there was nothing to be done about it.

CAROL

Is that the man?

TURNER

Yes, ma'm. Excuse me, please.

Turner goes over to Rindell and the other cop.

CAROL

Oh, Joe.

TURNER

Mr. Rindell, we won't need you anymore tonight. One of our officers is going to drive you to a motel. Rest up for a day or so. Did the doctor give you something to help you sleep?

RINDELL

Yes, sir. I hope they work. I just called my wife. She's driving from Los Angeles to get me. I was supposed to meet her there.

(beat, he's starting to tear up again)

I don't think I'm every going to drive again.

The other cop leads Rindell out. Meanwhile, Turner has moved over to where an ambulance attendant is filling out forms. He takes Sam's stetson from the desk top, and brings it back to his desk. Carol, seeing the hat, touches Rossi's elbow.

CONTINUED

10. CONTINUED

10.

ROSSI
(crossing to the desk)
Those are Sam's things?

TURNER
That's right. We're going to
inventory them.

ROSSI
This is Sam's fiancée. They ought
to go to her.

TURNER
Did he have any immediate family?

CAROL
No. I was going to be it.

TURNER
(a favor)
Listen, you can look through them
if you want, but I can't let
you take anything.

ROSSI
Okay.

CAROL
Thank you.

Turner takes the items out of the hat: a bandana, change,
car keys, motel key, wallet, gum. Carol picks up the
hat and holds it.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Oh, God.

ROSSI
(comforting her)
Carol --

CAROL
Joe, it's finally hitting me.
Do you mind if I -- I --

Turner sees that Carol is about to fall apart, and swings
around the desk. He takes her arm, and supports her.

TURNER
(leading her)
Come on, I live right next door,
my wife can stay with you. Go on
miss..it's okay, let it out.

CONTINUED

10. CONTINUED

10.

Finally, someone has told Carol it's okay to break down. She responds immediately.

CAROL

Oh, my God...No, no...

As she disappears out the door with Turner, we hear the sound of her sobbing increase. Rossi, distressed, fingers Sam's hat. Suddenly he realizes that something is missing from Sam's effects. The envelope. He sorts through everything, checks the lining of the hat: nothing. He spots the ambulance attendant, getting ready to leave.

ROSSI

Excuse me.

ATTENDANT

Yes?

ROSSI

I'm a reporter from the Los Angeles Trib. Can I ask you a few questions? I'm a friend of the -- uh --
(there's no other word)
deceased.

ATTENDANT

What can I do for you?

ROSSI

Listen, was there any papers or anything at the scene when you got there?

ATTENDANT

(instantly)

A long white business envelope?

ROSSI

Yeah, it could be.

ATTENDANT

Sure, I remember picking it up.

CUT TO:

11. INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - NIGHT

11.

A sheltered parking area, like the kind near the emergency entrance to a hospital. They are searching the back of the ambulance.

ATTENDANT

I know I put it in here.

CONTINUED

11. CONTINUED

11.

He can't find it, starts looking under equipment. Still nothing.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Just a regular white envelope, right?

ROSSI

I don't know. Sam didn't tell me.

ATTENDANT

Where the hell is it?

ROSSI

Could you have dropped it when you moved him into the hospital?

ATTENDANT

(thinking)

No. I don't know. We were trying to save a guy's life.

(amazed)

I know I put it in there.

ROSSI

Well, it's gone now.

CUT TO:

12. INT. LOU'S HOME - NIGHT

12.

Lou is on the phone. His laundry is stacked on the sofa; half of it is folded. The eleven o'clock news is glowing on the television, but the sound is turned off.

LOU

(into phone)

Rossi, I'm not pulling you off for good. But you're not in any shape to be working.

INTERCUT WITH:

13. EXT. PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

13.

ROSSI

(into phone)

No way, Lou. I've got to find those papers.

LOU

Just let Joselyn work on it for the next few days.

CONTINUED

14. CONTINUED

14.

ROSSI

If you do that, Lou, I'll quit,
so help me. I'll do this work
freelance if I have to.

(impassioned)

I mean it, Lou. Please.

LOU

(changing strategy)

Okay, okay. At least let us help
you on this end. What do you need?

ROSSI

Can somebody do some checking on
the guy who hit Sam? His name's
Howard Rindell. R-I-N-D-E-L-L.
Ohio license number 329 H-B-L.
Says he's from Sandusky.

LOU

(writing this down)

First thing in the morning. What
else?

ROSSI

Nothing tonight.

(beat)

Lou?

LOU

Yeah?

ROSSI

I feel like I've got a hole in
my chest about twelve inches around.

LOU

Oh, Joe. I know. I'm sorry.
Get some sleep.

ROSSI

I will. Thank you.

LOU

Okay. Good night.

ROSSI

Good night.

Rossi hangs up. So does Lou; he doesn't want to bear the
weight of this bad news alone, so he picks up the receiver
and dials another number.

INTERCUT WITH:

14. INT. BILLIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

14.

Billie is sitting up in bed, reading a book and making notes in the margin. The phone rings, she picks it up.

BILLIE
(into phone)
Hello?

LOU
Billie, it's Lou.

BILLIE
What's up?

LOU
Bad news; awful. Sam Beecher,
Rossi's friend, was hit by a car
and killed a few hours ago.

BILLIE
Oh, no. Poor Rossi.
(empathetically)
How did he sound?

LOU
Not good. I wish he had somebody
down there to keep an eye on him.

BILLIE
Want me to go?

LOU
No. I want you to do two things:
first, check on the guy who hit
Beecher. I'll give you the dope
on him in the morning. And call
Congressman Bob Phelps. Beecher'd
been in contact with him. See if
he has anything to say.

BILLIE
Okay, Lou.
(then)
Hey, you think if someone went after
Rossi's friend that he might be in
danger, too?

LOU
Now wait a minute. We know a man
was killed. We don't know it was
murder.

CUT TO:

15. INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT TO DAY

15.

It is very late. Carol is curled up on the couch with Rossi's coat over her legs like a blanket. Rossi's sitting opposite her on a chair. Both are achy and exhausted. Carol is all cried out at last. The two sip hot chocolate from styrofoam cups.

CAROL

I don't know what I'm going to do about a funeral.

ROSSI

Yeah.

CAROL

He used to tell me he wanted to lie on the crest of a hill, under a Joshua tree. How can I do that? His folks are buried in Glendale.

Carol smiles a little.

ROSSI

That sounds like Sam. He liked to make it hard on us, didn't he? Always putting his friends to the test.

(appreciatively)

And you never let him down.

Rossi stops. The guilt he's been fighting all night finally surfaces.

ROSSI (CONT'D)

I did. A lot of times. But never as bad as I did on this. I feel -- like his dying is my fault. I brought him in to talk to my editor. We sent him back there.

He looks up at Carol, really distressed. She sits, staring into her cup of chocolate.

ROSSI (CONT'D)

(with feeling)

It would be nice if you'd tell me it's not my fault.

CAROL

It's not. You'd know that any other time. Sam would've taken his story somewhere else. You were a good friend to him, Joe.

CONTINUED

15. CONTINUED

15.

The two of them sit in silence, absorbed in memory. Carol starts to yawn, fights it.

CAROL (CONT'D)

(embarrassed)

What am I doing?

ROSSI

No, that's good. You gotta get some sleep; don't fight it.

CAROL

Yeah.

Carol starts to get up, but it's not easy. Rossi comes over to walk her to the bed. He turns down the covers, sits her down. Then he kneels and takes off her shoes.

CAROL

(dead tired)

Thanks.

ROSSI

Lift up your arms.

Carol does, and Rossi pulls off her sweater. She lies down on the bed, he covers her carefully with the blankets.

CAROL

(already asleep)

Thanks.

Rossi looks down at her. He's having trouble fighting back the tears. He reaches down and brushes the hair from her face. Carol's life is very precious to him right now. He walks over to the window, and, as early dawn brightens the room, he closes the curtains.

CUT TO:

16. EXT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

16.

From across the court, we see Rossi close the curtains. We then see who has been watching him: a STRANGER, in his late thirties. He is sitting in his car, trying to stay warm and alert by drinking coffee from a thermos, but he keeps his attention on Rossi's motel room.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

17. INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

17.

The end of the news conference: all the regulars are in attendance.

FINANCIAL EDITOR

You know that blizzard they had back east?

JAYSON

Sure, I love the national weather stories. They convince me the property taxes out here are worth it.

FINANCIAL EDITOR

Well, the mayor of this midwest city decides to see for himself how bad things are at the airport. Doesn't want them closing it down unnecessarily. So they drive him out onto a runway and it's blowing so bad the truck gets lost. After two hours they end up having to use radar to bring hizzoner back to the terminal.

HUME

Wouldn't be surprised if he sends the city council out next time it snows. Are we finished here?

JAYSON

Yup.

NATIONAL EDITOR

Charlie, I'd like a clarification on something.

HUME

Sure.

NATIONAL EDITOR

It's this story I hear Lou's doing. Nuclear safety?

LOU

What about it?

NATIONAL EDITOR

The plant you're investigating --

LOU

NUKCON.

CONTINUED

17. CONTINUED

17.

NATIONAL EDITOR

It's out of state, isn't it? And you've got Rossi assigned to it? Looks to me like a national story. Las Tunas is hardly within the metropolitan area. Even giving you the benefit of the doubt, I think you're on my turf.

LOU

(reasonably)

Listen, this started out as a very low percentage story. Rossi dug up the source, and I let him take a chance on it. We had no idea it was going to break into something this big.

NATIONAL EDITOR

And now that it has, I think my man should take over. He's been covering the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and knows the background. He's the one to run with this.

LOU

The hell he is. We developed the story. We're doing the story.

NATIONAL EDITOR

Come on, there's no reason for this to be a Metro story.

LOU

Listen, a week ago I couldn't have given you this idea gift-wrapped. Now Rossi's source is dead, there's a possibility it's murder, and suddenly you're talking about your "turf". I'll tell you something, Jim, I sent Sam Beecher into a dangerous situation. Today, he's in the morgue, in some godforsaken desert town, and I'm feeling very responsible.

(to Hume)

I'd like to see somebody try to take this story from me.

There is dead silence in the room.

HUME

(to National, mildly)

That clarify things for you, Jim?

CUT TO:

18. INT. CITY ROOM - DAY

18.

Lou leaves the conference room and is button-holed by Billie.

BILLIE

Lou, I'm waiting for a call-back
on that guy Rindell. Should know
something about him any minute.
And I talked to Congressman Phelps.

LOU

Did he sound interested?

BILLIE

He's so interested, he's in your
office.

Billie indicates Lou's office, and Lou heads that way.
Standing to greet him is Congressman BOB PHELPS, a Pete
McCloskey-type politician: cast in the youthful mold,
but more a boxer than a tennis player.

LOU

(extending his hand)
Congressman Phelps.

PHELPS

(shaking hands)
Please. Bob.

LOU

Good to see you again.

PHELPS

Yeah, Lou. When was the last time?
That day the Vikings beat the Rams.

LOU

(smiling)
Oh yeah. In all the rain and mud.
What a beautiful day.

PHELPS

I keep forgetting you're from
Minnesota.

LOU

Listen, Bob. I'm glad you stopped
by. Did you know Sam Beecher?

PHELPS

Only on the phone. What happened?

CONTINUED

18. CONTINUED

18.

LOU

We don't now yet. It looks like an accident. But maybe not. He'd been making a lot of enemies lately.

PHELPS

Yeah? At NUKCON? He didn't tell me.

LOU

What did he tell you?

PHELPS

He outlined conditions at the plant, things he said were unsafe.

LOU

Why'd he pick you?

PHELPS

I suppose because I'm on the occupational safety subcommittee.

LOU

Looks like you've got yourself a hot issue.

PHELPS

All the issues are hot. We just don't know enough about the long term effects of a lot of these chemicals we're making. It's not only the radioactive stuff. Look how long it took us to understand the dangers of working around asbestos.

LOU

Or lead.

PHELPS

Exactly. And NUKCON -- I'm talking deep background, okay?

LOU

Okay.

PHELPS

We've been trying to nail NUKCON for some time, but it's not easy.

LOU

You mean that? You've got the weight of the federal government behind you?

CONTINUED

18. CONTINUED

18.

PHELPS

I've got the weight of government
bureaucracy behind me. And in front
of me. And on top of me.

LOU

Yeah.

PHELPS

And don't forget the nuclear lobby.
They pack a lot of clout around
Washington.

Billie enters. Congressman Phelps rises.

LOU

Billie, good. Congressman Phelps
was just filling me in.

BILLIE

Please sit down. I'd like to listen.

PHELPS

I was just about to tell Lou how
I wish the Trib would stop calling
me an environmentalist. For every
vote that label gets me from the
backpackers, I seem to lose three
from people who think my stands are
I'm costing them work.

LOU

It hasn't cost you any election that
I know of.

PHELPS

(grins, rises)

Listen, I want to be kept informed on
this Beecher thing. Tell me anything
you feel you can. Meanwhile, I'll get
my office looking into it independently.

LOU

That's good to hear. Thanks for
coming by.

PHELPS

So long.

Phelps heads out the door, coat over his arm.

LOU

'Bye, Bob.

BILLIE

Goodbye.

CONTINUED

18. CONTINUED

18.

Once he's through the door, Billie rises and closes it. She crosses to Lou.

BILLIE (CONT'D)

I've got some information on Rindell.

LOU

Oh? What'd you find out?

BILLIE

He lives in Ohio all right. Sandusky. Works as a security guard for Continental Shoreline.

LOU

What's that?

BILLIE

A tiny company that makes oceanographic equipment.

LOU

Nothing there then.

BILLIE

Except I traced it through two holding companies and a couple of false fronts and guess what?... it's a subsidiary of NUKCON.

Off his reaction:

CUT TO:

19. INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

19.

Rossi has just entered with a sack full of food. Carol is on the sofa, making a list of the people she has to notify about Sam's death.

ROSSI

We're still being watched. I saw the guy again just now. Here's the food. Forget about getting corned beef in this town. You're having ham and cheese. On white.

CAROL

Thanks. I'll take anything.

Carol has been looking out the window, sees something.

CONTINUED

19. CONTINUED

19.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Oh-oh. Joe, there's someone coming our way. He's heading toward the door.

ROSSI

What's he look like?

CAROL

(checking)

He's big and weird-looking. What'll we do?

ROSSI

(scared)

If he wants a confrontation, I'll give him one. You keep out of the way.

There is a knock at the door, Rossi crosses to it, throws it open, revealing ANIMAL, his sweet smiling self.

ANIMAL

Hi, Rossi. Lou sent me down to get some shots.

Rossi jumps on him, simultaneously hugging and pounding him.

ROSSI

Animal! Jeesh! Why didn't anybody tell me you were coming? We were scared stiff.

ANIMAL

Probably 'cause Lou sent me here to look out for you, and he didn't want you saying no. Does me being here bum you out?

ROSSI

Are you kidding?

(indicating Carol)

Animal, this is Carol.

(to Carol)

He's one of the photographers at the Trib.

(to Animal)

Carol was my friend Sam's fiancée.

ANIMAL

(To Carol, shaking her hand)

Hey, I'm sorry.

CONTINUED

19. CONTINUED

19.

CAROL

(nodding)

Thanks.

ANIMAL

Listen, there's something else. Lou didn't want to phone you this, but Billie found out something heavy. That guy who was driving the car, Rindell, is tied to NUKCON.

CAROL

Oh, no. I've been praying that it was just an accident.

ROSSI

Hey, Animal, you came at the right time. There's some big strong-arm jerk been watching Carol and me, and I'm gonna find out what his game is. Right now. Stay with Carol, willya?

Rossi heads out the door.

CUT TO:

20. EXT. MOTEL - DAY

20.

We are at a public phone booth. The man who has been watching Carol and Rossi is talking on the phone. The door is closed. Rossi comes rushing up to him, rips open the door. He is concealing his terror with rage, but not very well.

ROSSI

(fierce)

Tell whoever you're talking to I'm getting sick and tired of this harrassment.

STRANGER

(into phone, frightened)

Listen, I'll have to call you back. Something's come up.

Rossi wrestles the receiver from the Stranger, starts to hang it up.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

(as the receiver goes down)

I'm okay, I'll call you later.

ROSSI

Listen, buster, you're not calling anybody for while.

CONTINUED

ROSSI (CONT'D)

You must think the press is pretty gutless, trying to scare us off this way.

STRANGER

I figured you were a reporter. That's why --

ROSSI

Well, you figured right. And I'll tell you something else. I don't care what you try, or how frightened I am, it's not going to get me off this story.

STRANGER

Listen, I work at NUKCON --

ROSSI

I thought so. Who were you just talking to?

STRANGER

My wife.

ROSSI

Your wife?

STRANGER

Yeah, she worries about me. Look, I want to help you.

ROSSI

Well, you got a funny way of doing it. Why were you hanging around? Why didn't you just come up to me?

STRANGER

I wasn't sure about you.

ROSSI

Okay, who are you?

STRANGER

No way I'm gonna tell you. I gotta keep my job.

ROSSI

Well, let's go someplace private --

STRANGER

No! No, we may be watched. Just let me do this fast. Don't ask my name, I won't tell you. And if you find out, I'll say I never talked to you.

20. CONTINUED

20.

ROSSI

Okay, what have you got for me?

STRANGER

Well, I've been at NUKCON since it was built ten years ago. I was there when the accident happened.

ROSSI

(taking out his pad)

What accident?

STRANGER

Six years ago. That's what Sam was looking into. Check the medical histories of employees. People are dead. Check it out.

ROSSI

(writing)

Listen, what kind of accident was it?

STRANGER

Check it out. You'll see.

Rossi looks up from his pad, sees Stranger turn the corner and disappear.

CUT TO:

20A. INT. CITY ROOM - DAY

20A.

Billie is at Lou's desk. Donovan is listening to them, but continues reading copy.

LOU

Congressman Phelps has backed off on his investigation of NUKCON? Where'd you hear that?

BILLIE

His secretary called me just now. Apologized for not returning all my calls, but said that the NUKCON business was "temporarily tabled" in favor of more pressing matters.

DONOVAN

Like the celebrity tennis tournament he's refereeing.

(looking through a stack)

I just got some copy on it.

CONTINUED

20A. CONTINUED

20A

LOU

Sounds like he's beating a hasty
retreat.

BILLIE

He seemed so gung-ho. What do
you supposed happened? Somebody
get to him?

LOU

Don't make me guess, Billie. Find
out.

Billie nods and returns to her desk.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

21. INT. PRATT LIVING ROOM - DAY

21.

The living room of a home in Las Tunas, either a California bungalow or mobile home. In any case, it's only about ten years old. Rossi sips coffee and chews on a cookie while MRS. PRATT, widow of a NUKCON employee, tells her story. A sulky seven year old boy is sitting with her.

MRS. PRATT

NUKCON saved us, Mr. Rossi. We had four little kids -- Jay-Jay was just a baby then -- and after Allan died, we almost lost the house.

ROSSI

That was back in August of 72, right?

MRS. PRATT

Yes. Right at the hottest time of the year.

ROSSI

Do you remember an accident at NUKCON earlier that year?

He sets down the cookie and starts writing.

MRS. PRATT

Do I remember? I can give you the date. Allan told me it was nothing to worry about, but when they come rushing into your house, strip the sheets off your bed and the clothes out of your closet -- well, you don't forget something like that.

ROSSI

(stops writing)

They really did that? Took away your clothes and all?

MRS. PRATT

Oh, yes. No explanation. Allan asked me to trust him that it was a false alarm, that we hadn't been contaminated, and I did.

(then)

But it wasn't the same after.

ROSSI

You mean your marriage?

CONTINUED

21. CONTINUED

21.

MRS. PRATT

Everything. Allan got more and more depressed. He was obsessed with the idea he had cancer. Was going to doctors until he died.

ROSSI

So he was right. He got cancer.

MRS. PRATT

(surprised he didn't know)
No. Allan shot himself. Suicide.

ROSSI

Oh?

MRS. PRATT

That's why the insurance company wouldn't pay off our policy. But Allan's boss at NUKCON said we'd be provided for, and he kept his promise. He said the company felt bad, seeing how much pressure Allan'd been under. I'll tell you, I'm grateful to them for life.

Rossi nods, looks up at her, and finishes his note-taking.

CUT TO:

22. INT. CITY ROOM - DAY

22.

DONOVAN is seated at his desk, reading copy. Billie comes up to him, excited.

BILLIE

Where's Lou?

DONOVAN

He's down in composing.

BILLIE

Rats. I'll leave him a note.

She sits at Lou's desk, writing on a piece of scratch paper as she talks.

BILLIE (CONT'D)

But I'd love to see his face when he reads this. I learned why Congressman Phelps put a stop to the NUKCON investigation.

CONTINUED

DONOVAN

He found out Grandma had the family fortune tied up in their stock, right?

BILLIE

No, better. Or worse. I just got word from a very peeved member of his staff. He says the Congressman got mixed up with a fifty-dollar hooker with a tape recorder and enough business sense to use it.

DONOVAN

And NUKCON'S got the tape?

BILLIE

(absorbed in writing the note)

Or a friend of theirs in Washington does.

DONOVAN

So now Phelps is worried about his own occupational safety for a change.

BILLIE

Boy, oh boy, the guy falls victim to the oldest trick in the book. How could he be so dumb?

(can't keep from laughing a little)

Poor bugger.

DONOVAN

Billie?

BILLIE

Yeah?

DONOVAN

(dead serious)

It's not funny.

BILLIE

Oh, sure, I know that. I didn't mean -- (trying to be sober)

I'm sorry, Art.

DONOVAN

All right.

Billie heads back to her desk, but keeps looking back at Donovan for his "just kidding" smile. He does not oblige her.

CUT TO:

24. INT. INDUSTRIAL DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

24.

Rossi is seated across the desk from NUKCON's physician, DR. ROBERTA GIANNI. Her office provides a totally sterile environment, with its metal desk, chairs and file cabinet. The only sign of life is a poster on the wall with a "Wuv is... helping a friend" sentiment. Her desk is piled with medical records, to which she refers throughout the scene. She is prepared for this visit, and throughout, she remains a very cool cookie.

GIANNI

What can I do for you, Mr. Rossi?
My supervisor told me to see you.

ROSSI

Actually, I'm a little frustrated.
Hope you don't take this the wrong way, Dr. Gianni, but I wanted to talk with someone higher up than you.

GIANNI

Don't you be offended, either, but I was hoping one of the higher-ups would talk with you, too. I'm kind of new at dealing with the press. Besides, I wasn't with NUKCON at the time of the incident you mentioned. I've pulled the files.

ROSSI

Just exactly what happened?

GIANNI

(referring to file)

As I understand it, there was some leakage of radioactive material, and certain low-level contamination of some employees. But, as I'm sure you know, great pains were taken to insure that the contamination spread no further.

ROSSI

Isn't it true that three employees of NUKCON back in 1972 subsequently died of cancer?

GIANNI

That's not statistically abnormal.
Does it surprise you to discover that people who work here are susceptible to the same diseases as everyone else?
(looking over a chart)
One of those men had lung cancer.
Heavy smoker.

CONTINUED

24. CONTINUED

24.

ROSSI

And one had cancer of the pancreas.
The other one, cancer of the liver.

GIANNI

I'm afraid that's just not unusual.

ROSSI

It would be if they all were on the
same crew when the accident happened.

GIANNI

Perhaps. But we'll never be able
to test your thesis. All the workers
rotate throughout the plant.

ROSSI

How about injury to the temporary
employees?

GIANNI

The day workers? What about them?

ROSSI

Well, as I understand it, you use
high school boys and migrant workers
for particularly hazardous jobs.

GIANNI

Well, I don't accept your choice of
the words 'particularly hazardous',
but yes, we do hire boys for a day
or two.

ROSSI

And they can be subject to a year's
worth of radiation in a single day,
right? Isn't that why you try to find
new people?

GIANNI

That's generally right.

ROSSI

"Generally right." Where, specifically,
am I not right? I don't want to be
inaccurate.

GIANNI

(hedging)

No, you're not inaccurate --

CONTINUED

24. CONTINUED

24.

ROSSI

Okay, these day workers, these kids -- How many of them were involved in the '72 accident?

GIANNI

I don't have any idea.

ROSSI

Well, what do the records say?

GIANNI

We don't keep a medical file on the day workers.

ROSSI

So there's no way to know what happened to them? As a doctor, don't you find that disturbing?

GIANNI

(a little laugh)

I'm sorry, Mr. Rossi. It's just typical of the way things are run here. The bureaucratic mess in this place would amaze a postal worker.

ROSSI

But you're in charge of the medical records --

GIANNI

And I don't have the staff or the funding to handle things any differently.

ROSSI

But we're talking about the lives of people working at NUKCON --

GIANNI

Mr. Rossi, I know you're upset. You knew Sam Beecher. You think he was murdered.

(off his puzzled look)

The company grapevine's the most efficient thing we've got. Off the record, you want my opinion of what happened?

ROSSI

Yes.

CONTINUED

24. CONTINUED

24.

GIANNI

Nobody at NUKCON had Sam Beecher killed. Frankly, I don't know anybody around here who'd have that much initiative.

Rossi looks up at her, finding what she's said difficult to swallow. Gianni responds with a smile and a shrug.

CUT TO:

25. INT. COCKTAIL LOUNGE - NIGHT

25.

We are in Las Tunas, in a western-motif bar where the plant workers hang out. Rossi and Animal are seated at a large booth, talking with some of the WORKERS. In the background, a mini-skirted cocktail waitress with a bee-hive hair-do serves the customers. She is the most popular thing in this place. The day shift is over.

WORKER ONE

I've been working for NUKCON eight years, seen some goofs, and there's nothing wrong with me.

WORKER TWO

That's not what Marylou says.

Everyone laughs.

WORKER ONE

(to #2)

Remember when I left my gloves in here that night?

WORKER TWO

And we had to sneak in at four in the morning to get 'em back before work the next day?

ROSSI

You mean you contaminated this place with radiation?

WORKER ONE

(genial, but all-knowing)

Aw, I don't think we did any real harm. 'Course the chili in here's never been the same since.

More laughter.

WORKER THREE

Yeah, it's better.

CONTINUED

25. CONTINUED

25.

Hilarity.

ANIMAL

(to #2, referring to
cocktail waitress)

I can hardly wait 'til they turn out
the lights and she glows in the dark.

ROSSI

(none of this is funny, but
he's trying to stay pleasant)

You didn't tell the management about
the gloves?

WORKER ONE

Are you kidding? I like that guy.
It could've really put a dent in his
business.

ANIMAL

(casually)

Mind if I take a few pictures?

WORKER THREE

(genially)

Bet your life we do.

Animal sets aside his camera.

ROSSI

What about the accident back in '72?

WORKER TWO

What about it?

ROSSI

I hear it was pretty bad. But nobody
wants to talk about it.

WORKER TWO

Why should we? Your average guy
doesn't understand. He panics. We
work around it every day. We know
how to handle it. It doesn't bother
us.

ROSSI

But NUKCON -- doesn't your employer
have a duty to give you guys a safe
place to work?

CONTINUED

25. CONTINUED

25.

WORKER THREE

Mister, do you know what Las Tunas was like before NUKCON came here? It was just a pitiful little town. When the interstate bypassed us, it looked like we were doomed. Then, suddenly this plant is built, and we've got ourselves some action. A place to work. Money to spend in bars like this one.

WORKER TWO

And a pretty decent school system, thanks to the taxes NUKCON pays. I got kids to think of.

ROSSI

Don't you worry about them getting contaminated over a long period of time?

WORKER TWO

(belligerent)

No. I worry about keeping them fed.

WORKER THREE

(pointedly)

You know what really gets me? Disloyalty. Biting the hand that feeds you.

ROSSI

What are you talking about?

WORKER THREE

I'm talking about people trying to destroy a company from within.

WORKER ONE

He's talking about Sam Beecher.

WORKER THREE

If you ask me, we're better off without him.

ROSSI

Sam was trying to help you.

WORKER TWO

He asked for it.

(directly to Rossi)

I say anybody who comes into town and tries to shut this place down, stop out paychecks, he's asking for trouble.

Rossi and Animal are very aware they're being threatened.

CONTINUED

25. CONTINUED

25.

ROSSI
(staying cool)
Can I quote you on that?

CUT TO:

27. INT. STAIRWELL AT FORUM - NIGHT

27.

Lou is coming down the stairs with a cardboard tray containing hot dogs and drinks. Bob Phelps is coming up the stairs.

LOU
Hi, Bob.

For an instant, Phelps is reluctant to acknowledge him.

PHELPS
Lou, hi. Some game, huh?

LOU
Sure. That's why we're both out here with three minutes left in the first half.

PHELPS
Who you rooting for this time?

LOU
Lakers. Been a fan from way back.

PHELPS
Oh, sure. When they were in Minneapolis.

LOU
And the name made sense. It's a dumb name for an L.A. team. Where is there a lake around here?

PHELPS
I guess they figured calling them Los Angeles "Mudslides" was even dumber.

LOU
(casually)
Billie says that you decided against investigating NUKCON.

PHELPS
I'm glad you saw me here. Billie is wrong. We did investigate the Beecher business.

CONTINUED

27. CONTINUED

27.

LOU

Oh? What'd you find out?

PHELPS

It seems as though the kid was kind of a whiner. He never got as high up in the company as he wanted, he'd just turned thirty, realized he was dead-ended, so he took it out on NUKCON. You know the type.

LOU

Sure. Happens all the time.

(then)

What did you find out about his allegations?

PHELPS

The safety problems?

LOU

Yeah. You checked out his complaints anyway, didn't you?

PHELPS

Lou, consider the source. Now if we heard from a grievance committee at that plant or something, that's another story. But one disgruntled employee --

LOU

Especially one who's dead.

PHELPS

(a warning)

That's out of line.

LOU

No, it's not. I'll tell you, Bob. One of our reporters picked up on your problem with the strange bedfellow.

PHELPS

Oh?

LOU

As a matter of fact, when we get some people willing to talk on the record about it, it'll make a real nice sidebar to our story on NUKCON. Blackmail is always a grabber.

CONTINUED

27. CONTINUED

27.

PHELPS

Listen, Lou, don't use a little
blackmail of your own. It's a lot
more complicated than that.

LOU

I believe you. That's why you're
getting all this lead time to think
about your response to the charges
before we run it. Enjoy the game.

Lou walks away, leaving Phelps with plenty to worry about.

CUT TO:

28. INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

28.

Carol, Rossi and Animal are sorting through boxes containing
Sam's belongings.

ROSSI

(finishing a box)

Nothing. He must not have been
keeping any NUKCON stuff in his
apartment.

CAROL

Either that, or someone got to
it before we did.

Carol pulls a heavy metal object out of a carton.

ANIMAL

What's that?

CAROL

It's a geiger counter. Sam got
it for his high school graduation.

ROSSI

Oh, yeah. I remember. I got
a watch with a radium dial. We
fiddled with both of them all day.

CAROL

When the two of us would go out
on the desert, we'd take it with us,
looking for uranium.

(a sad memory)

Later on, Sam started using it to
check himself out.

ANIMAL

How does it work?

CONTINUED

28. CONTINUED

28.

ROSSI

(trying to remember)

Well, one of these things here
is a switch -- somewhere here...

CAROL

Here, I don't know, this clunker's
pretty old. But if it were working,
and if there were anything radioactive
around, you'd flip this switch, and
it would start clicking away...

She flips the switch: it clicks like crazy. The three
look at each other.

CAROL (CONT'D)

That can't be.

She switches it off, then turns it on again. It clicks
as before.

ANIMAL

Rossi, you wearing that watch?

ROSSI

No. Hey, Carol, can that be a mistake?
Why is it doing that in here?

CAROL

I don't know. Let's see what's
setting it off.

She walks around the room. The counter continues to
clatter. When they get to the closet, it goes bananas.

ROSSI

Our clothes.

CAROL

I bet my room's just as bad.

ANIMAL

What are we gonna do?

ROSSI

Somebody wants us out of here.

CAROL

And we're going to accomodate
them. First we call the cops.

ROSSI

And I better call Lou.

CONTINUED

28. CONTINUED

28.

CAROL

Tell him to warn a hospital in L.A. that three possible cases of radiation contamination are on their way in.

ANIMAL

Shouldn't we go to a local hospital?

CAROL

After all this? Let's get out of Las Tunas while we can.

CUT TO:

29. INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

29.

Animal is standing outside the door of his hospital room, tucking in the world's starchiest shirt, and pulling up a pair of rainbow suspenders. All his clothes are brand new, and he feels very uncomfortable. Lou is with him.

ANIMAL

Thanks for the clothes, Lou. You sure my mother didn't help pick these out?

LOU

I had to guess on size. How'd I do?

ANIMAL

Pretty good, Lou.
(hoping)
The tie was a joke, right?

LOU

Uh-huh. So were the suspenders.

Animal looks down at his suspenders, trying to figure out the joke.

ANIMAL

Oh yeah? I like 'em.

LOU

Which one's Rossi's room?

ANIMAL

(indicating)
That one.

He starts in.

ANIMAL (CONT'D)

Lou, Rossi's pretty depressed.

CONTINUED

29. CONTINUED

29.

LOU

I know.

CUT TO:

30. INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

30.

Rossi is standing at the window looking out. This is a private room -- one bed. Carol approaches Rossi, puts a hand on his shoulder.

CAROL

I'm going to go now, Joe.

Rossi nods.

CAROL (CONT'D)

I want to try to get back into the old routine. These last few weeks really --

Rossi swings around and holds her tightly. She starts to cry.

CAROL (CONT'D)

You should do the same. Get back to the office, see some familiar faces.

She kisses his cheek and pulls away. She moves to the door.

ROSSI

(a wave)

'Bye.

CAROL

(returning the wave)

'Bye.

She opens the door and as she starts to exit, Lou enters.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Lou, hi. Thanks for the clothes. You've got good taste.

LOU

I raised three daughters.

And she is gone.

LOU (CONT'D)

So you all got a clean bill of health. That's great.

Rossi continues staring out the window.

CONTINUED

LOU (CONT'D)

What's the plan? Want me to drop you off at your place, or do you want to go back to the paper?

ROSSI

Lou, they chased us out of town. We're licked.

LOU

No, not entirely. The cops are looking into Sam's death. It's starting to look like the guy who was driving wasn't acting alone. Billie's checking out a rumor that his wife opened a new bank account a week after the accident. They'll get him.

ROSSI

Sure. He'll take the fall.

LOU

Don't be so sure. Rindell probably thought manslaughter was the worst charge they could pin on him. If that becomes murder, he might decide to talk.

ROSSI

But what about the story, Lou? We're back where we were the day Sam came to the office with accusations and no evidence.

LOU

We know there's a story there now. We're just going to have to wait for something to break.

ROSSI

It's all there. The town that won't talk, people bought off, harrassment... People who'd risk their families' health rather than lose their jobs. There's gotta be a way to tell that story.

LOU

You've got an alternative, you know.

ROSSI

What?

LOU

Take a year off and write a book. Fictionalize it.

CONTINUED

30. CONTINUED

30.

ROSSI

Come on, Lou.

LOU

No, you could do that. But we can't print it as news. Not without substantiation.

ROSSI

I know.

LOU

(gently)

Let me take you back to work.

Rossi looks up at Lou sadly, nods.

CUT TO:

31. INT. CITY ROOM - DAY

31.

Rossi walks into the city room from the main doors. Lou follows him, they head for the desk. As he passes the switchboard, one of the operators hands Rossi a small stack of messages. The copyboy approaches Rossi, hands him a stack of mail.

COPY BOY

Been saving your mail, Rossi.

ROSSI

Thanks.

DONOVAN

Howdy, stranger.

ROSSI

Hi, Donovan.

DONOVAN

Welcome back. The gang put me in charge of the welcoming committee.

ROSSI

Okay, but I hate these big deals. Let's get it over with.

DONOVAN

We already did.

Rossi nods and heads to his desk, looking through his mail.

BILLIE

Hi, Rossi. You're looking pretty good. I'm sorry about your friend.

CONTINUED

31. CONTINUED

31.

ROSSI

Thanks.

(looking at the front of envelope)

What's this?

BILLIE

Huh?

ROSSI

(spooked)

Sam's handwriting.

(trying to call)

Lou. Lou.

Billie checks the postmark.

BILLIE

Postmarked the eighteenth.

(realizing)

That was the day.

ROSSI

Yeah.

He opens the letter. It is full of xeroxed paper. Lou comes up to the desk.

LOU

What is it, Rossi?

ROSSI

(indicating letter)

From Sam.

(reading)

Dear Joe: Remember Murphy's Law? Well, just in case one of us screws up, I made a protection copy of everything I gathered from the plant. Getting cautious in my old age. Even you can't deny that this makes for one hell of a story. You're welcome. Sam.

Rossi glances at the rest of the material, can't talk, hands it to Lou.

LOU

(reading the second page)

In 1972, the accidental leakage of highly radioactive materials at the NUKCON Corporation's Las Tunas facility led to the exposure of hundreds of plant

(MORE)

31. CONTINUED

31.

LOU (CONT'D)
workers who received insufficient
treatment, and the subsequent death
of four employees.

ROSSI

Five, Lou.

Lou nods, gives Rossi a squeeze, and hands him back the papers.

LOU
Write your story.

FADE OUT:

THE END