Broadcast News

by

James L. Brooks.

FADE IN

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

A restaurant supply truck is curbside, near a small restaurant. GERALD GRUNICK, forty-one, is closing the back door of his truck, feeling good about the world, a common state for him. He moves towards the cab of the truck and gets inside as we SUPER:

KANSAS CITY, MO. - 1963

INT. TRUCK - DAY

As he sits down beaming over his recent good fortune... now we REVEAL his twelve-year-old son, TOM, seated quietly beside him. He seems a bit down. Gerald glances at his son.

GERALD
I don't know a recent Saturday I've sold more. You didn't think I'd sell that health restaurant, did you?

TOM
No. Not even you.

GERALD
Why so glum?

TOM
I don't know.

GERALD
(a beat)
Go ahead.

TOM
No, nothing. I've got a problem, I guess.

GERALD
Were you bothering by those waitresses making a fuss?

TOM
No. But, honest. What are you supposed to say when they keep talking about your looks? I don't even know what they mean -- "Beat them off with a stick."

Gerald stiffs a grin.

GERALD
You know, Tom, I feel a little proud when people comment on your looks. Maybe you should feel that way.

TOM
Proud? I'm just embarrassed that I like when they say those things.

GERALD
As long as that's your only problem you're...

TOM
It's not.

He looks directly at his father and talks quietly, and sincerely.

TOM
I got my report card. Three Cs, two Ds and an incomplete.

GERALD
Oh my. I see you studying so hard, Tom. What do you think the problem is?

TOM
I'll just have to try harder. I don't know. I will.
(talking himself into it)
I will. I will. I will.

He shakes his head for emphasis, glad he's received this pep talk from himself -- he hands the card to his father.

TOM
Thanks, Dad, this talk helped. Will

you sign it, please?

GERALD
(as he signs)
Would it help if I got you a tutor?

TOM
(suddenly hopeful)
That would be great.
(worried)
It better help. What can you do with yourself if all you do is look good?

SUPER THE LEGEND -- "FUTURE NETWORK ANCHORMAN"

FADE OUT

FADE IN

BOSTON, MASS. - 1965

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

AARON ALTMAN, looking almost preposterously young in his graduation gown -- is delivering his valedictory. He is a rare bread -- a battle-scarred innocent.

AARON
...and finally to the teachers of Whitman High School, I don't have the words to express my gratitude which may have more to say about the quality of the English Department here than my own limitations...

He awaits a laugh and gets only the weird sound of collective discomfort.

AARON
...that was, of course, not meant to be taken seriously. A personal note. I am frequently asked what the special difficulties are in being graduated from High School two months shy of my fifteenth birthday. I sometimes think it was the difficulties themselves which enabled me to do it. If I'd been appreciated or even tolerated I wouldn't have been in such a hurry to graduate. I hope the next student who comes along and is able to excel isn't made to feel so much an outcast. But I'm looking forward to college; this is the happiest day I've had in a long time. I thank you and I forgive you.

This is very little applause.

ANGLE ON TEACHERS

MALE TEACHER
I'm always so confused by Aaron. Is he brave and earnest or just a conceited little dick-head?

BACK TO AARON AS WE SUPER: "FUTURE NETWORK NEWS REPORTER"

ANGLE ON STAGE

As Aaron walks to his seat past three full grown tough looking semi-literate high school graduates.

YOUTH #1
Later, Aaron.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Clusters of graduates at the fence bordering the sunken school yard looking down as the tough cap and gowners seen earlier cuff Aaron around.

CLOSER IN

Aaron feeling from a blow -- his lip bleeding -- his teeth covered with blood...as he gets to his feet. He is livid -- something primal triggered by this brutality.

AARON
Go ahead, Stephen -- take your last licks.
(points at his face)
But this will heal -- what I'm going to say to you will scar you forever. Ready? Here it is.

He dodges as they come after him. They catch him by the hair and hurl him to the ground. As he gets up he hurls his devastating verbal blow.

AARON
You'll never make more than nineteen thousand dollars a year. Ha ha ha.

They twist his arm and grip him -- his face scraped on the concrete.

AARON
Okay, take this: You'll never leave South Boston and I'm going to see the whole damn world. You'll never know the pleasure of writing a graceful sentence or having an

original thought. Think about it.

He's punched in the stomach and sinks to the ground. As the Young Toughs walk off Aaron catches a phrase of their conversation.

YOUTH TOUGH
Nineteen thousand dollars...
Not bad.

FADE IN

ATLANTA, GEORGIA - 1968

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT

JANE CRAIG, ten years old, is in her room typing. Above the desk where she works is a bulletin board with letters and pictures tacked to each one. Her desk has several file racks which contain bulging but neat stacks of air mail envelopes -- a roll of stamps in a dispenser is to one side. Jane types very well in the glare of her desk lamp.

JANE
(voice over; as she types)
Dear Felatzia, it's truly amazing to me that we live a world apart and yet have the same favorite music. I loved the picture you sent and have it up on my bulletin board. You're growing so much faster than I am that I...

OTHER ANGLE

SHOWING Jane's FATHER standing near the door.

JANE
(voice over)
...am starting to get jealous. I read in the newspapers about the Italian strike and riots in Milan. I hope you weren't...

FATHER
(softly)
Honey?...

Jane SCREAMS, and grabs her heart, breathing heavily, babbles nervously at her Dad.

JANE
Oh God -- Daddy -- don't...don't... don't ever scare me like that -- please.

We SUPER: "FUTURE NETWORK NEWS PRODUCER"

Her father is himself taken aback with the shock of her reaction. Falling back towards the door:

FATHER
Jane -- For God's sake...
(recovering)
Look, it's time for you to go to sleep.

JANE
I just have two more pen pals and then I'm done.

FATHER
You don't have to finish tonight.

JANE
(he doesn't get in)
Nooo. This way the rotation stays the same.

FATHER
Finish quickly. I don't want you getting obsessive about these things. Good night.

We REMAIN WITH Jane who has obviously become disconcerted and troubled.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

As Jane moves to room at the other end of the hall -- a family room where her Father reads the latest Rolling Stone of the mid-60's -- Hunter Thompson, the New Journalism, the slim Jann Wenner -- Jane bursts into the room.

JANE
Dad, you want me to choose my words so carefully and then you just throw a word like 'obsessive' at me. Now, unless I'm wrong and...
(enunciating)
...please correct me if I am, 'obsession' is practically a psychiatric term... concerning people who don't have anything else but the object of their obsession -- who can't stop and do anything else. Well, Here I am stopping to tell you this. Okay? So would you please try and be a little more precise instead of calling a person something like 'obsessive.'

She advances furiously on her Father since even this strung out, even with two additional pen pal letters to get off, she had enough sense of duty to kiss him good night before storming from

the room. She exits the room INTO BLACK.

Stay on BLACK as we begin MAIN TITLES:

OVER EXT. SMALL MID-WESTERN CITY - DAY

Emerging from the blackness -- Jane Craig -- now a twenty-eight-year-old woman -- a long speed walker wearing a jacket to which reflecting stripes have been glued -- the kind of gear only possessed by someone who runs at off-hours. The Jacket itself is a wish-I-had-it souvenir from some important news assignment, the sort of treasure you love about all else yet never mention. She stops running as she feeds quarters into the first of a phalanx of newspaper machines -- getting seven different papers before moving on.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

As she enters from the bathroom, having showered and dressed. The sun is jus now rising. She sits next to her phone.

INSERT: JANE'S ROOM

The Filofax book is almost an additional character -- a crucial hand-fashioned tool of Jane's trade. She flicks at a page -- takes down a typewritten sheet scotch-taped to it showing the room number of her crew and reporter.

ON JANE

As she dials one room number.

JANE
(into phone)
Hi...It's me...

INT. DUPLICATE MOTEL ROOM - DAY

ANGLE ON CAMERAMAN -- his equipment in evidence though essentially asleep holding his bedmate's hand, as he listens to Jane.

JANE'S VOICE
(voice over)
It's thirty minutes before you have to meet me in the lobby -- nudge your wife.

BACK TO SCENE

JANE
There's probably no time to eat... but there's a cafeteria at the bus depot once we get down there. I love working with you two...It saves me a call.

She dales.

INT. DUPLICATE MOTEL ROOM

Where Aaron is switching his TV from station to station, monitoring the early morning news. His PHONE RINGS.

AARON
Hi. Turn on your TV... Good Morning America, the Morning News and Today are all about to talk to Arnold Schwarzenegger and I think he's live on at least two of them.

BACK TO SCENE

JANE
At six o'clock on the wake-up news they used the wrong missile graphic.

AARON
(Austrian accent)
Now listen, Arnold just said that he's been making three million a movie now. But he's not ever gonna change. He's still the same person when he was making two million dollars a movie. He feels no different. He also bought a brand-new condo with Maria, they gonna furnish tastefully.

JANE
A half hour in the lobby.

AARON
(Austrian accent)
Okay, I'll see you in the lobbies [*sic*].

She hangs up -- takes the phone off the hook and lays it on the bed for a moment's solitude. She sits stiffly, palms on top of her legs. It looks like someone with unusually good posture, waiting for something, and now we BEGIN TO SEE the first signs redden and she begins to cry. Now she sobs -- then miraculously shakes it off and exits quickly to the bathroom. This crying episode is clearly part of her morning routine.

INT. BUS STATION - DAY

Jane standing behind her husband-wife - camera-sound team as they train their attention on Aaron; who is getting ready to do a stand-up. There is a DERELICT off to one side. Aaron holds his microphone at the ready.

AARON

Ready.

CAMERAMAN
Your hair's a little funny.

AARON
It's an ethnic curl, I can't do anything about it.

CAMERAMAN
In front of a little -- it's a bit... You want a mirror?

AARON
No -- Don't worry about it. Let's do this.

Jane nods her assent.

CAMERAMAN
Okay.

AARON SEEN THROUGH CAMERA

AARON
In other times, for other purposes, there might be a band and bunting here at the bus depot for J.D. Singer's return from war. He...

JANE
(interrupting)
I'm sorry. But look at how wonderful his face is.

She points to the derelict.

AARON
Oh, you mean use him...That's nice. Okay.

CAMERAMAN
I'll put him in the low corner of the frame -- good.

AARON
In other times, with other purposes, there might be a band and bunting here at the bus depot for J.D. Singer's return from war. Last week he was decorated by a president for heroism in a war. But it was the civil war -- in Angola -- and he was in it for the money.

He puts the microphone down.

AARON
Thanks.

He passes a vending machine and checks the stray hair.

INT. GATE AREA - DAY

Jane in the distant b.g. on the phone. Aaron and crew shooting as the bus pulls up, hisses to a stop and tired, rumpled passengers exit the bus. J.D. SINGER, strong, 9'6" figure emerges and is displeased to find a camera trained on him. He reacts with all the grace of a short mercenary.

J.D.
Go 'way.

J.D. gets his luggage from the compartment under the bus. The crew shooting.

AARON
Just a few questions?

J.D.
No.

He starts walking -- the four person newsteam staying with him.

AARON
We came from Washington.

J.D.
Move away from me.

AARON
(holding out microphone)
How long has it been since you've been home.

J.D.
(moving)
Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuckes. Snot... Fuckee. You want to use that?

AARON
It depends on how big a news day it is.

They reach Jane. She calls to him.

JANE
J.D. I'm Jane Craig. I spoke to you in Angola. I gave you some sugarless gum and Handi-Wipes.

As he reacts to her:

INT. JANE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Jane sitting next to Aaron making detailed timing notes as she screens the material shot that day on a portable monitor unit.

AARON
Where's where I asked him about being scared?
(then)
You should work on your speech.

JANE
No. It makes me nervous to think about it. Let's do this.

She consults her notes and goes back to the exact spot.

AARON
(on tape)
All this business of war -- do you get scared?

J.D.
(on tape; he smiles)
Uh-uh.
(then)
I'm a little freaked right now about seeing my father though.

He laughs self-consciously and turns briefly away.

JANE
I love that turn away.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Jane is at the lectern in the darkened auditorium as two large monitors display some taped news pieces she has assembled. On the lectern is a sign telling us we are at the Conference of Local Television News Broadcasters.

JANE
(in darkness)
There's a point I'm trying to make about these pieces coming up.

A WOMAN'S OUTLINE blacked out from behind -- her VOICE **ELECTRICALLY DISGUISED.**

WOMAN
(o.s.; angrily)
I don't think any client of mine makes less than fifty thousand dollars a year which means they can afford the best and you're damn right I feel good that that includes me.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER ANGLE - ANOTHER WOMAN
in blackness, her VOICE DISGUISED.

WOMAN TWO
(o.s.)
No. You'd be surprised at who a working girl meets. I've been a working girl for what? -- over a year anyway and that must be a thousand men and I don't think there's an age or type that hasn't been in there.

INTERVIEWER'S VOICE
(voice over)
Policemen? -- Doctor? -- Lawyer...?

WOMAN TWO
(o.s.)
Oh, sure. Television reporters.

A laugh from the audience. There is a:

CUT TO:

ANOTHER ANGLE - FULL FIGURE
A WOMAN in blackness.

WOMAN THREE
(o.s.)
I'm seventeen now and I've been working the streets for two years and I guess to be honest -- I stopped thinking of it as temporary.

The lights come up on the room. The two screens go black... there is general APPLAUSE. Jane blinks nervously.

JANE
Please don't applaud.

ON AUDIENCE

Sitting in groups of three -- NEWS TEAM from around the country, remarkably similar in comparison...a great looking woman, good looking man (either young or attractively avuncular) and a Black or Hispanic. They still APPLAUD -- not yet having grasped the sincerity of Jane's plea which she presses with more urgency.

JANE
Please. Don't!!
(she yells)
I gathered these pieces as an example of what's <u>WRONG</u> with local television news.

The applause stops.

JANE
The excerpts from THREE SEPARATE SERIES on prostitution were SIMULTANEOUSLY broadcast by all stations in one city during sweeps week. By what bend of either or suspension of duty is that broadcast news?

She pauses half a beat for possible applause -- hearing none, she continues. An anchorman sneezes -- four people shout "gesundheit" simultaneously -- they laugh.

JANE
The legacy of Edward R. Murrow, Eric Sevareid, William Shirer, David Brinkley and Walter Cronkite is being squandered in a desperate popularity contest. Our profession is in danger:

TRACKING SHOT

As Jane continues, REVEALING that the news team now have even more in common. They do not like Jane.

JANE
Yesterday's compliment has somehow managed to become today's kiss of death. To be considered a serious journalist is no longer flattering. It presents the risk of being labeled ponderous, or worse yet, elitest, right?

SHOT CONTINUES

Women playing with their hair, young man bored...one middle-aged anchorman fusses with a spot on his tie...

ON JANE

Briefly departing from text.

JANE
All of you know what I'm talking about. We're all trying to act together than we are. But we care. So, we're all secretly terrified, aren't we?

Not a peep -- she is thrown but doggedly presses on with her prepared speech though her throat constricts a bit, her voice begins to rasp.

JANE

We are being increasingly influenced by the star system. The network anchormen are so powerful they compromise our last best hope. The current group is clearly qualified, tied still to our best traditions, but who follows these men?

TRACKING SHOT MOVES TO TOM GRUNICK

Seated with other members of his news team, a young blonde woman whose hand is resting on his inner leg, a good looking Hispanic. Tom feels a growing excitement -- Jane is not just a speaker, she seems a savior.

TOM

Wow.

His female colleague looks at him.

FEMALE COLLEAGUE

Oh, I've known so many women like that. They don't like their looks so they're angry.

BACK TO JANE

Fumbling with her cards, sunk but game -- gamer than she would wish.

JANE

I was going to talk about other trends but...

(mumbling)

...the magazine shows, news at profit, influence of Entertainment Tonight, the danger, the hope, the dream, the question...Oh, I was going to show you a tape -- a story that was carried by all networks on the same night -- the same night -- not one network noted a major policy change in Salt Two nuclear disarmament talks... Here's what they ran instead...Go ahead. Show the tape.

ON MONITORS

Showing the Japanese Domino Championships as broadcast by all networks in the Spring of 1985. It is quite spectacular -- the dominoes falling into one another provoking waves, crossing tiny bridges, setting off little fireworks. JANE'S AUDIENCE applauds loudly and squeals with delight.

ON SCENE

Jane between the two monitors. She begins to speak loudly OVER

the AUDIENCE NOISES of approval.

JANE
(loudly)
I know it's good film. I know it's fun. I like fun. It's just not news.
(as they continue to applaud)
Well, you're lucky you love it -- you're going to get a lot more just like it.

STRAY VOICE - SHOUT "GOOD"

OTHER ANGLE

Jane sitting rocked into momentary catatonia, by the event. Dazed as an animal stung by a tranquilizer dart. She takes some irregular breaths waiting for normal life to return.

WIDER

Tom the last person remaining in the room. He approaches her -- she is totally unaware of his presence, even when he casually mounts the stage with an athletic leap. It takes courage for Tom to fully intrude himself, which he now does:

TOM
Hello.

She looks up at him.

ANGLE ON TOM

Earnest, nervous -- handsome...Just when she needed a mirage there it is.

JANE
Hi.

TOM
I just wanted to tell you how great you were. My name's Tom Grunick.

JANE
(dumbly)
Thank you.
(then)
They hated me. I don't hate them.

TOM
Well, they say if you can reach even one person, it means something... And you did that.

Jane looks up at his smile -- a beat then:

JANE
Would you like to have dinner with me?

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jane arrives at the maitre d' stand. She has attempted to dress up to the extent that packing for a short-day trip allows. She looks for Tom. Tom rises from a table and is immediately at her side.

JANE
Hi. I was worried I was early.

TOM
I was a lot earlier.

They are lead to a table and sit down.

TOM
I kept thinking what a great break it was for me to get to see you tonight. More than a great break, maybe just what I needed...just when I needed it...Angel of mercy -- godsend...lifesaver...what?

JANE
(picking one)
I like "godsend."

TOM
I haven't been in news that long. I've just been looking for the right person to talk to. I have about two thousand questions for you.

He notices that her head has gone into her hands where it continues to rest. He looks at her a beat.

TOM
It's possible now's not the right time.

She lifts her head.

JANE
If we could just eat first.

TOM
Totally understood. Totally wrong of me to talk shop after the day you've had. Totally sorry.

JANE
Nooo. If I could just have a

roll, I'd be okay.

She takes a roll from the roll plate. He smiles at her. She takes a bite.

JANE
Thank you.

EXT. CONVENTION HOTEL - NIGHT

As they walk along -- dumping occasionally and self-consciously. Jane is feeling a version of being turned on -- that is, a little adrift and temporarily free of obligations. She is open to making a memorable mistake.

JANE
Another thing I can't stand --
Is this dull?

Tom shakes his head almost violently.

TOM
No, no, no, no...

Jane looks at him curiously -- then:

JANE
(broadly)
Another thing I can't stand is ...when White House reporters bullshit with each other after a briefing and then one of them has a theory and the other quotes it in his story as "White House" sources say...

TOM
That actually goes on...

JANE
Yes. My room is down here -- I'm not tired. Do you want to keep talking?

TOM
Yes, sure.

INT. JANE'S ROOM - NIGHT

A small good room -- her working paraphernalia very much in evidence...the quality briefcase...the reams of well organized notes...the thick contact book -- Jane is sitting on the bed -- Tom, not far away in the room's only chair. One lamp is on and it serves to place Jane in the shadows and cast Tom in an enormously flattering light. MUSIC comes from her miniature portable STEREO system.

JANE
Come on...Even I'm not that hard on myself.

TOM
No, I really got this job on a fluke and wait till you hear where it ends up.

Jane smiles a calming smile.

JANE
I was doing sports at the station. The newspaper ran this untrue story that I was leaving and they got all these tons of protest mail. So they made me anchor.

JANE
So great -- right?

TOM
Except I'm no good at what I'm being a success at.

JANE
How are you at back rubs?

Jane shifts her position so that her back is to Tom... He is immobilized by the sudden turn. Jane waits, just a bit longer than it would take a man to run from the chair to her side before experiencing the ghost-like clutch of rejection. She moves briskly past the moment -- grabbing a "good night" chocolate from the pillow and munching it as she return to his agenda.

JANE
It's sort of normal -- the way you feel. In graduate school everyone thought the only mistake the admission committee made was letting them in.

He moves to the bed.

TOM
Listen to me. You keep on thinking I'm somebody ho lacks...confidence. That's not it. I know I can talk well enough and I'm not bad at making contact with people, but I don't like the feeling that I'm pretending to be a reporter.
(cont'd)
And half the time I don't really get the news I'm talking about. It isn't that I'm down on myself. Trust me, I stink.

JANE
(levelly)
I trust you.

TOM
I didn't even have the chance to get really good at sports. I wasn't bad. I thought I was starting to do interesting features but hockey is big at the station and...

JANE
(interrupting)
What about the obvious remedy? Reversing things. Maybe getting a job on a newspaper.

TOM
I don't write.

Jane laughs or, more accurately, scoffs as Tom Continues.

TOM
But that didn't stop me from sending out audition tapes to bigger stations and the networks.

JANE
Well, come on -- it is your life. Nobody is tying you to the fast track. Did you go to college?

TOM
One year...almost one year.

JANE
So, you're not well educated and you have almost no experience and you can't write.

He nods agreement.

TOM
And I'm making a fortune.

Jane laughs very briefly -- then rubs her face vigorously with her hands... He's making her feel a little crazy. She gets off the bed.

JANE
It's hard for me to advise you since you personify something that I truly think is dangerous.

TOM
Uh-huh.

JANE
(holding it in)
I agree with you -- you're not qualified.
(letting it out)
So get qualified. You can insist on being better prepared. You don't have to just leave it as...
(mimicking him)
'I don't write. I'm not schooled. I don't understand the news I'm reading. But at least I'm upset about it, folks.'

A beat, then he mumbles softly to himself.

TOM
Whoa, this was a mistake.

JANE
Just what do you want from me, anyway? Permission to be a fake? Stop whining and do something about it.

He gets up to leave. She follows him.

JANE
Well, you don't have to start right now.

He turns to her.

TOM
I hated the way you talked to me just now...and it wasn't just because you were right.

He exits.

INT. JANE'S HOTEL - NIGHT

She is on the phone.

JANE
(into phone)
No. It wasn't just the speech -- the same thing happened with this guy. I have passed some line some place. I am beginning to repel people I'm trying to seduce.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

As he talks with Jane.

AARON
(agreeably)
He must have been great-looking, right?

JANE
Why do you say that?

AARON
Because nobody invites a bad-looking idiot to their bedroom.

She smiles.

AARON
Okay. Let's do me.

JANE
Sure.

AARON
Okay. I feel like I'm slipping but do people who are actually slipping feel that way or is it always the really good people who are moving up who invariably think they're slipping because their standards are so high?

JANE
This conversation is not worthy of you.

AARON
I'd give anything if that were true.

JANE
(laughing)
Good night.

AARON
Wouldn't this be a great world if insecurity and desperation made us more attractive? If needy were a turn-on?

JANE
Call if you get weird.

INT. JANE'S HOTEL - NIGHT

She hangs up -- pulls back the bedspread on the double bed -- on the other half are papers, schedules -- tapes. She doesn't clear them off so that she is literally sleeping with her work. The PHONE RINGS.

JANE
(answering)
I was just thinking it was the shortest phone conversation we ever had.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH

A deserted well-lit area. Tom on the phone.

TOM
I never told you the reason I was telling you everything for.

JANE
(pleasantly surprised it's him)
Hey?

INTERCUT:

ON TOM

TOM
Those audition tapes I sent out... I've been hired by your network for the Washington bureau. So I'll probably see you at work. Sorry.

Jane is rocked and soured.

JANE
What???

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. STREET - MORNING

Jane and Aaron walking to work -- agitated.

AARON
They didn't hire Peter Stiller from the Times and he had a great audition tape.

JANE
You want to start going over who they could have gotten? They can't take on people like this for network news. For God's sake. What's going on?

INT. NEWS BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

Tom arrives for first day of work.

INT. ERNIE MERRIMAN'S OFFICE

ERNIE MERRIMAN is the network's Washington Bureau Chief. He is in his early 60's, has worked for the network about 40 years -- part of the golden age -- a family man, an honorable man, a good guy. Right now he is welcoming Tom to the network thereby good-naturedly helping with the destruction of all he holds dear. As he hands Tom his credentials:

ERNIE
Any particular area you feel strongest in?

TOM
To be honest, I was best at anchor.

Ernie gives him a long look -- is he kidding?

ERNIE
Why don't you take a few days observing the system? Then we'll put you on general assignment.

EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

Two small TV monitors -- a smallish room. Jane goes over her timing notes which correspond to the time code SUPERED on the monitors. BOBBIE -- an extraordinarily silent man -- is doing Jane's bidding. On the monitor we SEE the mercenary piece which Jane is editing against a tightening deadline. The PHONE RINGS periodically -- Jane conducting abrupt conversations which continuing to edit. The pressure is palpable to begin with but builds and builds; almost like a family fight getting out of hand and threatening to bend lives. Through it all, Jane remains remarkable calm. Her focus is amazing; her command sexy.

JANE
(consulting notes)
Go back to 316, Bobbie. The sound bite in the cab -- it starts, 'I don't know how I'll feel...'

BOBBIE
We could...

JANE
(interrupting)
Please, Bobbie, we're pushing.

As Bobbie expertly reverses the tape, Tom's face appears in the glass doorway and then he enters the already crowded room -- Jane's eyes click to him briefly. She makes not a move to welcome him. He pauses, but is committed and tries to find a piece for himself against the wall.

TOM
They said I should observe the...

Jane is distracted by the noise... Tom leaning over towards her.

TOM
They said it would be okay if...

JANE
(incredulous)
We're working here!! You can stand over in the uh, uh, uh...

She momentarily can't think of the word 'corner.' Then back

to Bobbie:

JANE
Play back the last line...

BOBBIE
He said something about...

JANE
(sharply)
Let me hear it!

Bobbie, taking the sharp commands with ever increasing, yet still repressed resentment.

The Assistant Director, BLAIR LITTON, enters the editing room. She is about 26 and every night since she got her job as Assistant Director she has been the first to crack under pressure.

BLAIR
We'll need it in ten minutes. We're putting it directly into...

Jane holds up a finger of warning to Blair as she picks up a ringing phone and talks to Bobbie at the same time.

JANE
(into phone)
Craig, just a second --
(to Bobbie)
Let me hear it!

Through much of this chaos we focus on:

TOM

Wedged into an uncomfortable position between two tape racks -- He is wide-eyed at this circus of tension and fear. His eyes dart around constantly -- trying to take in as much as he can, always returning with wonder to focus on Jane.

MERCENARY
(voice over)
It's been a long time since I've seen my folks and all but...I don't expect any big-deal homecoming.

JANE
Stop there.
(into phone she's been holding)
I want to shoot a picture from a book I have in the office.

BLAIR
You don't have time. Not a chance.

JANE
(into phone)
I'll be right down. It's right tight.

She crosses out.

BLAIR
I've got to tell Ernie...because there isn't enough time.

JANE
Yes, there is.

Blair leaves, as Jane gathers up her notes. She charges out leaving Tom awkwardly along with Bobbie.

TOM
I'm Tom Grunick. I started on General Assignment today.

Bobbie stops the machine, turns in his chair and shakes hands. Then he smiles secretly and speaks his first full sentence.

BOBBIE
I don't think she's going to make it.

Tom exits.

INT. BUREAU NEWSROOM

Aaron is having a theoretical discussion with Ernie and JENNIFER MACK, a correspondent in her early 40's, a pioneer beauties in news. She is well-schooled, bred, trained and known... GEORGE WEIN, a black correspondent in his 40s, and MARTIN KLEIN, formerly with the Johnson administration -- State Department correspondent for the network.

KLEIN
Okay, what about this? Here's a tough ethical one. Would you tell a source that you loved them just to get some information?

AARON
Yes.

GEORGE
Yes.

ERNIE
Me too.

JENNIFER
Sure.

AARON
Jennifer didn't know there

was an alternative.

Jennifer laughs that laugh one always hopes beautiful women will laugh when one says something funny. Aaron smiles at her.

AARON
Here's one. They allow us to have cameras at an execution in Florida. Do you broadcast tape of the guy in the chair when they turn on the voltage?

KLEIN
Sure.

JENNIFER
Why not?

ERNIE
Absolutely.

GEORGE
You bet.

AARON
Nothing like wrestling with a moral dilemma is there?

Blair enters the scene, Tom trailing several feet behind, continuing to monitor the budding deadline crises.

BLAIR
Excuse me, Ernie, we're several minutes to air and Jane's shooting an insert still for tonight's piece.

ERNIE
She knows how much time she has.

Blair flashes a tortured smile -- panic is growing.

BLAIR
Okay. I just wanted you to know.

AARON
What is she shooting?

BLAIR
Norman Rockwell's 'Homecoming.'

AARON
(thinks then)
Oh, that's nice...
(walking away)
We'll need some new lines.

INT. EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

Jane up against it now -- but still seemingly calm. Tom watching, keeps on glancing at the clock fascinated, impressed.

JANE
Okay, Bobbie, just a two-second dissolve to the Rockwell.

BOBBIE
Should I...

JANE
(interrupting)
Just a two-second dissolve.

BLAIR
(hurting)
Oh, Jesus, we have three minutes... Why do you do this to me. Is it because I won an award?

INT. RECORDING BOOTH - NIGHT

Where Aaron is writing his last line on a folded over piece of paper even as he gets ready to record. He times it with a stop watch.

AARON
Norman Rockwell's enduring portrait of a Homecoming The return of a fighting man has always been one of the more moving ceremonies of war... Tearful women, proud men, excited children. But J.D. Singer was right -- his homecoming was no big deal.

INT. EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

BLAIR
We have a minute and a half. It's my responsibility to tell them we won't be ready.

JANE
Uh-uh. We're be ready.

Blair glances frantically at her watch.

BLAIR
In 84 seconds?

ON CLOCK

Sweeping from 28 minutes to -- 84 seconds from deadline. Aaron walks in, Jane looks up.

JANE
(hopefully)
Nine seconds.

AARON
Eleven and a half.

JANE
Oh, God. Back it, Bobbie -- Bobbie?

ALMOST SIMULTANEOUS DIALOGUE FOLLOWS. IT BUILDS UNTIL IT DUPLICATE THE SOUND OF LOUD AND BAWDY SEX.

BLAIR
You're saying 'Oh, God..." They are going to go to up and the screen will be black -- they're going to go to black because we're not there. How about careers, huh? How about careers?

ON CLOCK

42 seconds away.

BLAIR
We're not going to make it.

Bobbie makes a small bobble -- Jane giving the merest evidence of the strain, scratching her face repeatedly.

BOBBIE
Whoops.

BLAIR
(unravelling)
Whoops?!? Whoops?!? No, please... no, ooh, ahhh, ohhh.

AARON
Shit, shit, shit...

TOM
(caught up)
You're almost there, you can do it -- can do -- can do.

And as the pitch reaches its zenith, 27 seconds left. Bobbie hands the tape to Blair.

BOBBIE
Ready.

INT. NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Blair hikes up her skirt and takes off.

VARIOUS SHOTS

Our "chase scene" as Blair soars through the newsroom, leaping a chair smoothly, smashing her leg against a table in full flight, the adrenaline deadening the pain -- she arrives at a waiting elevator -- uses a key dangling from her neck to unlock it... jumps nervously during the ride and now, in FULL EXTENDED FLIGHT, barrels down the long corridor heading to the control room where she arrives; slamming the tape into a technician's hand even as it is introduced on the air.

INT. NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Aaron, Jane, the others looking at the end of the piece on the air -- Tom in the b.g. as Blair enters -- relaxed, almost jaunty.

BLAIR
I was a little nervous there for a minute.

AARON
Oh, come on -- tell us another.

ON MONITOR

The end of the piece -- the Rockwell painting giving way to the mercenary's actual homecoming which matches the portrait. The irony works nicely. The network anchorman comes up for his close. BILL RORISH, 50 years old and able to flutter much younger pulses. He is able and experienced -- a reporter who has become a journalistic king.

BILL
(on monitor, smiling)
Bill Rorish...Thank you...Good night.

JENNIFER
Look at that smile. Oh, that was good and oh my, Bill <u>smiled</u> -- he liked it.

AARON
He loved it. Big smile.

He gives Jane a congratulatory sock in the shoulder which she returns -- Tom in the b.g. of the SHOT.

BLAIR
I haven't seen Bill smile like that in weeks.

Ernie has walked a few steps to the office.

BLAIR
Ernie, you missed his close... He smiled.
(mimicking)
Thank you...Good night.

She smiles.

ERNIE
I saw the smile -- good piece.

AARON
I'm gonna go look at it again.

They leave -- Aaron waving to Tom who stands in the b.g. The others leave. Tom approaches Jane.

TOM
I'm sorry if I was in the way. It was totally impressive. Great piece.

JANE
(somewhat formal)
You weren't. Thanks. How does it feel being here?

TOM
I can't believe I'm really here. No kidding. If you're through work now --

JANE
No. Aaron and I go to Central America on Wednesday -- so I'm cramming.

TOM
I thought you were incredible in there. I know how much I have to learn. I'd really -- a lot -- appreciate it...if...

JANE
'Really a lot appreciate it...'

TOM
You make me nervous. Anyway if I can pick your brain --

Jane grimaces at "pick your brain."

JANE
I can't help you, sorry. I'm not here to teach remedial reporting.

TOM
And it has nothing to do with the fact I left your room instead of staying there?

Jane looks at him.

JANE
Oh, please.
(then, almost gently)
You're gonna have to understand

something. This isn't personal.

She exits.

EXT. CENTRAL AMERICAN JUNGLE - MORNING

As Aaron, Jane and their CREW march along with a CONTRA SQUAD deep in their own conversation. Except for the DIN of TROPICAL BIRDS they seem almost like a cranky married couple on their way to work.

AARON
I didn't sleep. They're giving me less and less air time. They don't think I'm at all anchor material.

JANE
If we don't get to their camp soon, we won't be able to tape the supplies coming in.

AARON
Last time Paul was sick they gave Connie the weekend news instead of me.

JANE
You spend too much time -- much too much worrying about that crap...
(suddenly reacting)
Oh good.

They have entered a clearing where supplies have been dropped, the Guerrillas already tearing apart boxes with army boots inside.

ANGLE ON

A guerrilla soldier rubbing his shoeless foot. A pair of new boots sit alongside him. Jane's Cameraman prepares to shoot, saying in Spanish, then English:

CAMERAMAN
Put on the boot.

Jane rushes into the scene incensed.

JANE
Stop! We are not here to stage the news. Wait and see what he does.

Then to the totally confused soldier.

JANE (cont'd)
Sir, you do whatever you want. It's your choice.

By now there is a fair-sized cluster of armed men as well as the news team staring at the guerrilla, who is at loss as to

what is expected. He looks to Jane, who can offer no help save her own determination not to interfere. Finally he puts on the boot.

JANE
(to Cameraman)
Okay.

He shoots the scene.

INT. HAY ADAMS HOTEL

Tom, in shirt and tie, is on the phone. This is a big day.

TOM
Okay, I'll meet the crew there then. Could you give me that address again? Great. Yes, it's good to finally be getting to work. Okay that's 17204? 1-7-2-0-4. Thanks.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

As Tom gets directions from the CONCIERGE.

CONCIERGE
It's only ten minutes if you prefer to walk...
(as he walks away)
I'll look for you on the news tonight.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Tom has a real sense of the moment -- of having arrived. The strange bubble of pleasure rises to the surface as he walks off to cover his first story. He laughs out loud, loving his lot.

EXT. CENTRAL AMERICAN JUNGLE - LATER AFTERNOON

Jane in the f.g. with her crew while Aaron talks in rapid Spanish to the GUERRILLA LEADERS.

AARON (in Spanish)
Are you guys kidding or do you really think you'll run into something...? I mean, do you feel that every time and it never happens? Or is it the first time it felt that way and it's going to happen?... I mean, how bad can it be?... Are you nervous...? What's the chances on a scale of one to ten -- that we're going to be in a war within the next few hours?... Really?

He starts to walk towards Jane -- one of the men he was talking with calling after him with an added thought.

AARON

Thanks, you speak English very well too.

(to Jane)

Great news. He says they've been engaging the Sandinistas pretty regularly and that he'd be really surprised if we didn't take fire tonight.

Jane reacts -- a flash of exhilaration. Aaron is amazed at her attitude.

AARON

Look at her.

(to Jane)

If anything happens to me tell every woman I've ever dated I was talking about them at the end. That way they'll have to reevaluate me.

Jane laughs out loud, attracting the Guerrillas' attention. Aaron repeats his speech in Spanish. The Guerrillas laugh.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Aaron and Jane in line behind the Guerrillas. They HEAR A SHOT. The head of the patrol gestures -- deploying his men. Aaron grabs Jane and heads for some cover to the left. As they run -- more SHOTS. Jane in work mode. As soon as they settle.

JANE

Let's tape.

CAMERAMAN

(Spanish accent)

Much too dark. Black.

JANE

That's okay.

ON AARON BARELY DISCERNIBLE

As they start taping he is breathless with the nervousness of the nearly gunfire.

AARON

The first shots were fired not thirty seconds ago. The Contras feel they must be outnumbered this is so small a unit: that's a given. Still they hold their ground despite the fact that their weapons have been acting up -- misfiring or jamming. A new shipment of rifles is expected tomorrow -- all they got today were the shoes.

There is the SOUND OF GUNFIRE.

JANE
(to Cameraman)
Okay.
(to Aaron)
Great line at the end.

AARON
Did you shoot their boots?

JANE
Of course.

AARON
We can cut back at the end.

JANE
To the pan of the supplies boxes --

AARON
Can you believe it? I just risked my life for a network that tests my face with focus groups.

EXT. GOVERNMENT BLDG - AFTERNOON

Tom, squashed in amidst a small mob of reporters... behind a police line. He HEARS a reporter next to him say:

REPORTER
I think he's coming out now.

TOM
(to his crew)
They say he's coming out now.

A surge.

TOM
(to Reporter)
Is that him?

TOM'S CAMERAMAN
Yes.

Tom checks his notes.

INSERT - TOM'S BLACK BOOK

The same model we've seen Jane use. A list of questions written in big color highlighted letters. As he looks down to study them, everyone else moves suddenly off.

TOM'S P.O.V.

The mass of journalists and technicians shouting questions. "Will you dispatch troops?" after the Ambassador they've been awaiting -- clumping on his limo and then being shaken by the movement of the vehicle.

ON TOM

Standing alone and forlorn as his crew trots back.

CAMERAMAN
(observing Tom)
What's wrong?

TOM
I had a lot of questions here. I missed the story.

CAMERAMAN
Don't worry, it's okay. I got a piece of his face.

EXT. GUERRILLAS CAMP - MORNING

Jane is standing -- talking to her crew. Others asleep in b.g. -- a drowsy, morning-after feeling.

JANE
Are you all packed and ready?

CAMERAMAN
The stuff in the dark is not good. Nobody wants news lit like that.

JANE
Will you just get packed?

She waves him off -- then she walks several yards away, holding a knapsack in her hand. She takes off a brush and runs it through her hair -- opens a plastic case and takes out a travel toothbrush, brushes her teeth and rinses her mouth with water from her canteen. She puts everything back in place, then looks about, sobs for several beats. One of the Guerrillas hears her sobbing and enters the scene -- he stands a respectful distance away. Jane finishes, notices him, makes a face by way of explanation, and exits the scene feeling measurably better.

INT. WASHINGTON CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

The Washington Control Room. Jennifer, Jane, Aaron, Blair stand watching the intro to the Central American piece. Tom stands in the distant b.g. There are over a dozen monitors -- including one which is constantly on the anchor man, Bill Rorish.

ON TELEVISION MONITORS

Bill Rorish on camera -- an INSERT behind showing Aaron in

blackness planted into a Central American map bordered by rifles. A separate monitor shows the INSERT alone.

BILL (voice over)
A fire fight along the Nicaraguan border...in one minute.

The INSERT MOVES OUT AT US TO FILL THE SCREEN -- WE SEE Aaron's dim outline and HEAR him say:

AARON (voice over; on camera)
The first shots were fired not thirty seconds ago.

The MUSICAL "EVENING NEWS" SIGNATURE COMES IN ever-so-briefly. The SCREEN GOES TO A COMMERCIAL -- as Blair screams enthusiastically.

BLAIR
Great graphic, great graphic.

Ernie ENTERS THE SCENE... He kisses Jane in greeting -- pats Aaron on the back.

ERNIE
You finally got a piece in a few minutes early and I hear Bill loved it.

Jennifer gives Jane a mock pat on the back.

ERNIE (continuing)
I have somebody downstairs who one of the clerks brought in and vouches for. He says he has something to say about gays getting promotions at State... It can't hurt to tape him.

ON JANE

As she feels Tom staring at her -- turns and notices him for the first time.

TOM
Hi.

JANE
How's it going?

TOM
Can I buy you dinner sometime soon?

JANE
(thrown)
I just got back -- I don't know which end is up.

TOM

Okay.

In the b.g. WE MAY HAVE NOTICED Bill Rorish on one monitor as he picks up the phone at his anchor desk, during the commercial break.

BLAIR
Jane! Bill Rorish wants to speak to you at the break.
(as she hands it to her)
I never heard of him handing over compliments in the middle of the show.

There is a stillness in the Control Room as Jane speaks to the anchor man in New York who WE CAN VIEW on a monitor.

ON MONITOR

We see Bill Rorish.

BILL
(into phone)
Jane?

JANE
(into phone)
Yes.

BILL
(into phone)
Well, darling, if it gets any better than that, I'm going to have to bring you up here to New York.

JANE
(into phone)
Thanks. I just wish you'd kept the first twenty seconds.

Blair cringes at Jane's blunt reply.

JANE
(into phone)
But thanks.

BILL
(over phone)
Well, the visual with the boots at the end was just perfect.

Jane covers the mouthpiece and turns to Aaron.

JANE
God, he loved the boots.

Aaron reaches happily for the phone.

JANE
(into phone)
Aaron should be hearing this so I have an extra witness.

BILL
(over phone)
Well, you always want to give the credit away, do you?

JANE
(into phone)
No, I don't. He happens to deserve the credit. He's right here.

BILL
(over phone)
I'll speak to you soon

We see Rorish over the monitor. He hangs up.

JANE
(to Aaron)
He had to read over some new copy.

We see on the monitor that this is not so. It's a very eggy moment Aaron. Tom breaks the silence.

TOM
(to the rescue)
Okay if I watch you tape that interview downstairs?

AARON
Yeah.

As he passes Jane he leans next to her and WE HEAR him WHISPER.

AARON
Please laugh so they think I'm not dying inside but have so much style I just said something funny.

Jane does her part enormously well -- laughing with amusement... but her eyes blaze -- her friend has been needlessly humiliated. Blair wants desperately to be inside Aaron's joke.

BLAIR
What did he say?

JANE
(as if still amused)
I'll never tell.

INT. SMALL TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

BUDDY FELTON waits alone. A CAMERA CREW watches him. He is well dressed, exceedingly nervous. He summons the courage to ask a question.

BUDDY
Could I see how I photograph?

CAMERAWOMAN
Huh? Sorry?

BUDDY
'Cause for the interview they're going to use a screen and disguise me to protect my anonymity so could I see myself before that?

CAMERAWOMAN
Sure.

The Camerawoman punches a button and immediately Buddy's image comes up on a standing monitor on the studio floor. He's not happy with the image -- but works at concealing his reaction -- gasping a bit of air -- trying to touch it. Aaron enters. Tom smiles a friendly smile which flusters Buddy momentarily. But again he almost manages to conceal his private rush. Buddy's internal drama is such he invariably finds himself covering up, fearful roomfuls of people will simultaneously guess his thoughts.

Aaron directs him behind a screen and looks at his notes.

AARON
It's Mr. Buddy Felton?

BUDDY
Yes.

AARON
That's your full name?

BUDDY
Yes.

AARON
I might as well ask you the questions on tape. Is that all right?

BUDDY
Yes.

AARON
You worked at one time as Foreign Service Trainee in the State Department.

BUDDY
I was there two years and was promoted

on merit nine times.

AARON
Eventually rising to...

BUDDY
Office Bimbo.
(curbing his amusement)
No, I'm sorry.

Aaron is having a hard enough day, He is visibly annoyed.

AARON
You're saying the fact that you're gay had something directly to do with your promotions?

AARON
Eventually rising to?

BUDDY

G.S. I don't know.
(scratches his head)
I don't know numbers.

Tom laughs. Aaron shoots him a look.

AARON
You're saying the fact that you're gay had something directly to do with your promotions?

BUDDY
I don't like the word gay.

AARON
Which would you prefer?

BUDDY
Ravenous homosexual.

AARON
Stop the tape, okay. Forget it, Ellen. Let's call security and get him out.

As Aaron walks out -- Tom is momentarily fixed on the sight of Buddy walking in small circles giving himself a talking to.

BUDDY
(self flagellating)
Great time to act out, Buddy. You won't be happy until you turn the whole world off.

He notices Tom.

BUDDY
They're not really going to call security are they?

TOM
No, I don't think so.

BUDDY
How do I get out of here?

TOM
Follow me.

BUDDY
(dazzled)
You talked me into it.

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Tom distracted -- his day has been a bit of a bummer. Buddy self conscious -- the proximity creating an almost unbearable tension of romance and adventure.

INT. BUILDING LOBBY - NIGHT

A Guard on duty -- a BLACK WOMAN. She sees Buddy.

GUARD
Oh, you're the gay guy. I was just coming to find you.

BUDDY
I'm leaving.

TOM
(to Guard)
It's okay.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Walking. Buddy in step with him.

BUDDY
Sir?

Tom turns. Buddy talks rather quickly -- He cares very much about leaving Tom with the right impression. The last words of his speech he hadn't expected to say.

BUDDY (cont'd)
Thank you for not shunning me and all.
(more)
I really did have all that information but I thought I might just be being vindictive to get a little hunk of the ol' spotlight. I know, horrible --

but I didn't do it, so okay? And thanks again and would you like to have a drink -- at a regular bar?

TOM
Oh, sure. Okay.

His heart racing, Buddy attempts casual matter-of-factness.

BUDDY
Is there a regular bar around here?

INT./ENT. REGULAR BAR - NIGHT

Tom and Buddy on adjoining stools. For Tom, the last weeks have been humbling, antagonistic. He's enjoying Buddy who listens attentively and wholeheartedly endorses every word Tom speaks.

TOM
I've been doing some morning show stuff, but mostly radio -- that doesn't bother me. I'm in no rush for anything. It's just the snotty attitude, even if I have it coming, it's still...

BUDDY
Bad manners.

TOM
Yes. That's right.

BUDDY
I know...I mean you didn't do anything special for me tonight. You just had what I think are good manners, decency. And it really makes me want to be nice back and it has nothing to do with any homosexual thing.
(looks right at him)
Honestly.
(then away)
Because I don't know if you've homosexual or not and -- you're not, are you?

TOM
No...no.

BUDDY
One's enough.

Tom signals for the check.

BUDDY (cont'd)
I wasn't doing anything.

TOM
I really have to go.

BUDDY
Okay. At least let me show my appreciation. The Secretary of Labor is going to be indicted on Wednesday. For the graft thing he supposedly did before he was appointed.

TOM
What?

BUDDY
Yes, it's true. They're going to make it public Wednesday but isn't it a big deal for you to have it a day and a half early?

TOM
Yes. How do you know?

BUDDY
(shrugs)
My roommate's very social -- somebody from Justice was over and...I always hear things before they happen. Hey, and from now on, so do you.

INT. ERNIE'S OFFICE - DAY

George Weln, the black correspondent and Tom are seated in the office with Ernie -- they are in mid-meeting.

GEORGE
I'm virtually certain it's not true. He may be indicted eventually, but I don't think it will be this month.

ERNIE
(to Tom)
You want to be alone with me -- tell me your source?

TOM
If I told you I'm not sure it would totally convince you, but I totally believe the guy.

GEORGE
(insufferable)
Labor is my Department -- I can't conform it and my contacts go very deep.

TOM
So if it's true -- I'm terrific,

right?

ERNIE
It's not even a close call. Of course we can't go with it.

INT. EDITING ROOM - FOLLOWING DAY

Jane is working with Bobbie the editor... Snatches of the tape make it obvious that the Labor Secretary has been indicted -- George Weln stands behind Jane, who is dialing a number.

BOBBIE
Do you want him all the way to the car?

JANE
No stop where he's all besieged.

BOBBIE
Because...

JANE
(to Bobbie)
Right there, Bobbie.

Tom enters.

TOM
So he was indicted?

JANE
Yes.

GEORGE
We were right not to go with it.

TOM
But I was right -- just somebody give it to me. I had a good story.

JANE
(to George)
Give it to him -- so we can concentrate.

TOM
Ah, I don't want any credit. Bobbie and I serve anonymously.

He pats Bobbie on the back... and exits.

BOBBIE
(pausing in his work)
You know, I like Tom, because hi...

JANE
Bobbie, please.

INT. METRO BUS - DAY

Crowded rush hour... Buddy and Tom stand next to each other.

BUDDY
...and the White House is hoping to keep a lid on it for a few days till they figure out what to do.

TOM
Thanks a lot, Buddy.

BUDDY
(brushing it off)
Oh, please. So they were really impressed with you at work.

TOM
Not impressed exactly -- but a break in the clouds.

BUDDY
I see the change in you -- I see it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - DAY

The 10 A.M. briefing just breaking up -- Jennifer leaves her network seat in the front row, only to be grabbed by Tom who steers her outside.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE EAST WING - DAY

In the near distance a circular driveway and a silent armed MARINE GUARD, standing at attention.

TOM
(to Jennifer)
So he bought this Peugeot sedan at a greatly reduced price while he was there in charge of the White House Advance Team.

JENNIFER
How come you're not chasing it down yourself?

TOM
Look, I'm junior man -- and it's your beat.

JENNIFER
Boy, that's nice...I wish we could all deal with each other like this. I'll check it. Anything I can do for you?

TOM
This is my first time at the White House. Is there any chance to look at where he works and the rest of it?

JENNIFER
I didn't have the guts to ask when I first came up. I'll get you a great tour.

INT. BAR - EARLY EVENING

Buddy and Tom watching the Evening News as Jennifer finishes her story.

JENNIFER
(voice over; on TV set)
The President says it's not a violation but nonetheless White House sources say the full price will be paid for the Peugeot and new rules will put future bargain hunting off limits for Presidential Aides. This is Jennifer Mack at the White House.

Tom and Buddy smile at each other... energized -- up.

BUDDY
Forgive me, but it really is intoxicating being a news source.

TOM
Nobody else had it.

BUDDY
I wish it were you giving the story.

TOM
That's okay.

BUDDY
What if we just don't tell them anything anymore unless they let you do the story?

TOM
No. Really...don't worry about it.

BUDDY
Okay. And look, in the future I can call you when I have news for you. Don't feel you have to spend time with me just to get the information.
(a breath; then to himself)
Well, that wasn't as hard to say as you thought, was it, Buddy?

TOM
What do you mean? You're one of the few people in this town I can talk to.

Buddy puts his hand to his heart and makes a LOUD SOUND OF **RAPTURE.**

BUDDY
Hoooo.

The BARTENDER and some nearby patrons turn and look. Tom shifts with discomfort.

TOM
Hey, Buddy, don't do that anymore.

BUDDY
(simply)
Okay.

INT. WASHINGTON BUREAU - NIGHT

Jane waiting for an elevator... It comes and she steps on just as Tom clearly excited comes around the bend from Ernie's office calling for her. He goes to the stairs.

INT. WALKWAY - NIGHT

He runs out and sees Jane in the lobby below, then takes off after her.

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

As he enters and runs outside, looking in both directions then running off to the right. A BEAT -- REVEALING Jane has stopped to talk with Blair -- now she exits.

EXT. WASHINGTON STREET - NIGHT

Tom on the street, ahead of her, thinking he's behind her... He runs another half a block and stops dejected... Turns to walk back to the office. He keeps looking back to see if he missed her, so that his head is turned as Jane reaches him, says a fairly social:

JANE
Hi, how are you?

She keeps moving -- Tom spinning after her.

TOM
Wait -- I need you.

She stops.

TOM
I've got another story.

JANE
Some public official skipped a week on his Christmas Club?

TOM
The House Armed Service Committee has a secret report which says that the General Stillwell tank the Army has dumped a fortune into plain won't work. I have it cold, confirmed. They have five million dollars in this thing already.

JANE
Billion.

TOM
Okay, billion...right, of course. They told me I could have any producer I wanted -- and I want you.

As Tom savors the moment.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - EVENING

Various bureau personnel standing at their desks watching Tom's piece being broadcast. We SEE a TANK MISFIRING.

TOM
(voice over)
One source referred to it as a five billion dollar metal sculpture to ugly to look at and too big to bury.

AARON
(to Jane)
You write this?

JANE
I write for you sometimes.

AARON
Not because you have to.

ON MONITOR

We SEE a General walking away from Tom.

TOM
(voice over)
General Elton McGuire is in charge of the weapon system.

ON MONITOR - TWO SHOT

GENERAL
I've been in the Army twenty-seven years -- so I'll let the Army ask the questions, not you.

TOM
General, I don't want to bother you anymore or your family. But tomorrow there will be a mob of me back here -- so, if you have anything to say, why not say it now, sir, the way you want?

ON TOM

He is a study.

Looking at himself -- and though it's far from his first time on television -- it's the first time he's seen himself doing serious work and, by all appearances, doing it well. As the General answers in the b.g. --

BLAIR
I think it's great of us to have left in what you said -- just great of us.

Tom smiles modestly.

AARON
Yeah, let's never forget. We're the real story. Not them.

Tom and Jane look over -- then Tom looks to Jane for a verdict. In the b.g., the news goes to a commercial.

JANE
Yeah, I know, I went back and forth on it.

BLAIR
I liked it. He's not afraid to be human.

Ernie ENTERS THE SCENE with his fourteen-year-old DAUGHTER in tow... He approaches Tom.

ERNIE
My youngest wanted to meet you. This is Ellie.

TOM
Hi, Ellie.

ERNIE
You should be honored -- she never cares about meeting anyone here. But she liked you

on television just now.

AARON
(entering scene)
Hi, Ellie -- remember me?

ELLIE
I'm sorry -- from where?

AARON
I've been to your house a lot...

ERNIE
(helping)
And Aaron went on that fourteen day raft trip with us last year.

ELLIE
(vaguely)
Oh yes -- hi.

INT. NEWSROOM - NIGHT (LATE)

Tom is on the phone.

TOM
(into phone)
Hi, Dad...Did you see it? Great -- I'll send you a tape...I'm sorry I haven't called. Things were a little bumpy for a while. It's not important... I'm fine now.
(what he's been wanting to say aloud)
Hey, Dad -- I just may be able to do this job...Well, I'm glad you were sure.

INT. ERNIE MARRIMAN'S VIRGINIA HOME - DAY

Ernie is hosting the news staff for Sunday brunch -- they stand around drinking in small groups... Aaron is standing with Blair and a MAN in his fifties we have not seen before.

BLAIR
I don't know why we have to feel defensive about it. Newspapers are in business to make money -- why not us?

Aaron looks at her in amazement.

BLAIR
They criticize us for supposedly pandering while they run WINGO Games.

GREY HAIRED MAN
(amused)
Exactly right. Excuse me. I'm paid to mix.

Blair and Aaron laugh appreciatively as he walks off to another group.

BLAIR
Goodbye, Paul.

AARON
Take care, Paul.
(back to Blair)
It takes a certain kind of courage for you to say that in front of the President of the News Division.

BLAIR
You think anyone who's proud of the work we do is an ass kisser.

AARON
No. I think anyone who puckers their lips and presses it against his boss' buttocks and then smooches is an ass kisser.

BLAIR
My gosh, and for a while there, I was attracted to you.

She walks off.

AARON
Wait a minute -- that changes everything.

ON JANE

At the bar getting a drink.

Jennifer ENTERS THE SCENE... and leads Jane down the hall until they are standing alone.

JENNIFER
This is very awkward.

JANE
Go ahead -- what?

JENNIFER
Ummm -- it's dumb dorm stuff but I see Tom around you a lot and this is such a small office and I'd like to see him outside of work, unless there's some reason for you to mind...

in which case I just won't do anything.

JANE
God Almighty -- Whew. Do I mind? Why do I mind? I do mind. What a shock -- I don't have a right to... I don't think I like him. I know I don't respect him...So what am I talking about -- what am I saying to you?

JENNIFER
You're saying stay away from him.

JANE
(stupefied)
I can't be.

She blinks in wonder.

JENNIFER
We don't have to settle this definitively right now.

Jennifer moves toward the drinking table -- Jane, unsteadied by the dose of self-revelation, moves towards Aaron's circle and scratches his back in friendship... Tom approaches an she moves off -- not wanting to deal with him. She takes a few breaths as she keeps walking. We HEAR snatches of PARTY CONVERSATIONS, i.e:

GEORGE WELN
Tell me one person who ever left television news to work on a newspaper.

She moves on; Tom still following.

ERNIE'S WIFE
(holding Paul's arm)
I felt so proud when he turned down News Vice President so we could stay here. Suddenly, after all these years, we have a life.

Jane turns -- sees that Tom is still looking at her from a few feet away.

JANE
(badly)
Hi, Tom.

She stands there, genuinely frightened. She must deal with him now. He crosses to her.

TOM
It's the firs time I've seen

you dressed like this. You look so clean and pretty.

JANE
What do you mean clean?

TOM
At work there's always this sort of film over you.

JANE
Well, thumps like me leave appearance to guys like you.

TOM
You're great at taking the edge off a good time.

Jane starts twitching. She pauses -- holds a hand lightly on his arm to steady herself.

TOM
You okay?

JANE
Yes. Just don't say anything mean for a while. Thanks.

She meets his gaze for an instant -- and, in that instant, loses control for the first time in her memory. She looks strange as she retreats from this glimpse of upheaval.

JANE
I've got to find someone. It's important. Excuse me.

She walks away.

ON AARON AND ERNIE

ERNIE
I had the strangest thing happen yesterday. Anne and I have been married what? -- Thirty-six years... Everything fine -- two days after the promotion came through, I was checking myself in the mirror and she was making a face at me behind my back. So yesterday I looked in the mirror and she was doing it again.

AARON
You didn't say anything to her?

He shakes his head.

ERNIE

My instincts tell me not to.

Annie comes up.

ANNE
The office is phoning, honey.

He EXITS SCENE as Anne watches him go.

ANNE
I hope he moves that fast when it's me on the line.

ON JANE

As she passes a chair with an afghan shawl on the back -- she picks it up and wraps it around herself, a bit chilled. She sees Jennifer on the stairs and moves toward her calling in a too loud, anxiety-ridden voice as she goes.

JANE
Jennifer. Hey, Jennifer.

ON STAIRCASE

Jennifer turning as Jane whips up the stairs.

JANE
Forget what I said -- you do whatever you want to with him.

She pushes at Jennifer a little.

JENNIFER
Well, there's nothing I'm going to do right this second.

Jane pushes her again.

JENNIFER
But it's a party, right?

Jane smiles back feigning female bonding -- Jennifer goes back down the steps and crosses to Tom.

FULL SCENE

Aaron takes in Jane, who is taking in Jennifer and Tom -- then Aaron begins to sense a new dynamic in the room as Ernie re-enters and huddles briefly with Paul... The News President is intent... The two of them walk over to Tom and Jennifer. We PICK UP just a few words:

ERNIE
This would be a good time to tap that source of yours. He could have an angle or something.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Tom is startled but cool -- nods his head -- Jennifer is amazed looking at Tom with new and even prettier eyes... Paul and Ernie now move toward Jane, a whole flow of movement creating a new energy in the area. Jane sheds her Afghan as she rises to meet them.

ERNIE
(to Jane)
We want you to exec produce a Special Report...

JANE
What?

Aaron has come over to join them now in time to HEAR.

ERNIE
A Libyan plane shot up one of our bases in Egypt. It's all still happening.

JANE
Let's figure out the field.

ERNIE
Unfortunately, since Paul's here, he's made out the assignments... Jennifer at the White House... George at the Pentagon...Martin at State...and we need an anchor since Rorish is in his boat, so we're gonna do the whole report this afternoon from here...with Tom.

AARON
That's it. I resign as of now.

ERNIE
(to Aaron)
Stop it.

AARON
I'll tell you what. I'll stay if Tom knows how to spell Gaddafi.

JANE
Ernie, as much as I like you, I think I have to tell Paul what I think, because this is really sort of obscenely stupid.

ERNIE
Jane, if you want to, go ahead. I don't disagree with you.

Jane moves quickly off, awed at the prospect of taking on the big boss.

ON JANE

As she moves past Tom who is talking on the phone, eventually catching up with Paul. In the b.g. Tom has just HEARD the "BEEP" of an ANSWERING MACHINE.

TOM
Hello, Buddy. It's 1:35 -- and this is Tom. You can reach me at the office. It's important. I can use a little help.

Jane, because of the proximity to Tom is speaking in whispered intensity.

JANE
Tom isn't ready for the job you're about to hand him. Not near ready. Not by the longest shot. Aaron's spent six weeks in Tripoli, he's interviewed Gaddafi -- he reported on the Eight-one story. I think he's essential to do the job we're capable of and I think it's my responsibility to tell you that.

PAUL
Okay, that's your opinion. I don't agree.

JANE
It's not opinion.

PAUL
You're just absolutely right and I'm absolutely wrong?

She nods.

PAUL
It must be nice to always believe you know better. To think you're always the smartest person in the room.

JANE
(from her depths)
No, it's awful. Oh my, it's awful.

JANE
(turning to leave)
We'd better get moving.

As they move out... Jane goes to Aaron... He moves with her towards the door.

AARON
What happened?

JANE
I'll tell you later -- where you going to watch from?

AARON
Watch? --

JANE
I'll come by your place, right after...drink, take pills... Love you.

She runs out the door. Aaron turns mean and mocks Jane's last words -- screwing up his face in a savage burlesque.

AARON
Yeah, love you, too.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

As Jane briefly pauses to see which war has room. Tom opens the passenger seat of his car -- she gets in. It moves off.

INT. TOM'S CAR - DAY

As it moves off.

JANE
Nervous?

TOM
Excited.

Jane looks over at him -- there's no question he's just told the truth.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE - DAY

In the b.g. we SEE the Bureau Newsroom beginning to pulse with activity. Tom closes the door. He sits down behind his desk and opens a bottom drawer -- a clean whit shirt lies there. He opens the center drawer -- two ties are inside. He picks one. He reaches for a package of new red suspenders. He takes off the shirt and puts on the new one -- all of this the work of an expert craftsman. By the time he finishes he looks like the authority figure we know he's now.

INT. BUREAU NEWSROOM - JANE AND BLAIR

Jane is NOT hyper. She is purposeful -- organized -- even

calming Blair with a little physical contact -- a touch on the arm, to still her colleague's hysterical demons.

JANE
Tell George and Jessica to try and cover everything without Tom having to ask additional questions.

BLAIR
And Bobbie says...

JANE
Did you hear what I just said -- do you have that? Take a breath.

BLAIR
(a breath, then)
Yes.

In the b.g. Tom has exited his office and looks about -- waiting for some indication as to what to do next.

JANE
And the most important thing make sure his earpiece works, have back-ups ready. That's never been more vital. He must be able to hear me at every second and clearly.

Jane sees him. She moves across the room -- takes Tom by the arm.

JANE
We have twenty minutes -- you can wait in the studio.

Tom coughs nervously into his hand and takes a pen from a nearby desk, clips it into his inside pocket and walks off.

GRAPHICS ROOM - DAY

Jane is screening and asking corrections in a graphic representation of an F-14 shooting down a Libyan Air Force Mirage Fighter.

JANE
Put in the radar plane that spotted them to begin with.

GRAPHIC ARTIST
We have no pictures on file.

JANE
I can't draw -- but this is a rough idea.

She uses the stylus from the ELECTRONIC PAINT MACHINE to outline an American Air Force E-2C Hawkeyes Radar Plane. Her work is stunning.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT - DAY

He has a glass in hand -- some chips on the table with a bottle of wine as he selects a Cassette Desk to play. He picks a French song -- looks at some of his books. He might even read. He is feigning disinterest for an audience of no one. He SINGS ALONG with the RECORD in perfect French.

INT. STUDIO HALLWAY - DAY

Tom checking copy in the long hallway leading to the studio -- there is the merest of hubbubs causing him to look up. Buddy is being stopped at the other end of the hallway.

ON BUDDY AND SECURITY GUARD

GUARD
I have to check first.

BUDDY
(a bit frantic)
Well, then check -- but hurry --
There he is!!!

Buddy runs the length of the hallway to Tom's aide despite Tom's gestures to slow down.

BUDDY
Is everything all right?

TOM
Yes. You didn't have to come here.
It's just that I'm going to anchor
this special report on this Libyan
thing...

BUDDY
(delighted)
Anchor?

TOM
(amused despite
situation)
Yes, stop! I wondered if you could
find out anything about what's
happening.
(on Buddy's reaction)
What's wrong?

BUDDY
I broke up with my roommate --
He was really the magnet for

everyone who knew anything.

TOM
Oh.

BUDDY
Look, I can start up with him again if you really...

TOM
No. I'm doing fine...Look.

Tom stands there -- a man at home in this media castle.

BUDDY
Good. He's on the world's longest ego trip, let him take it alone.

TOM
Hey, okay. Look Buddy -- I've got to go to work.

BUDDY
(to Tom)
...good-bye then.

TOM
I'll speak to you.

BUDDY
Well, who knows. Just let m tell you what my favorite teacher ever, told me -- 'Don't be afraid to be wonderful.'

He leans forward, gives Tom a quick embrace, a small kiss on the cheek. Tom turns and walks off down the hallway to meet his immediate destiny as Buddy looks on.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Jane mounts some steps in the control room -- she moves past the DIRECTOR and TECHNICAL CREW up to the next level where the two news execs, Ernie and Paul stand with their backs to the wall, and then up one more step slightly above the desk and table occupied by Blair. Now she slips into the large well paddled throne-like seat -- as WE BEGIN MUSIC CUE.

Literally at her fingertips is the row of buttons which provide immediate access to the field reporters at the Pentagon, State and the White House. In front of her the bank of monitors, the Technical Team and past them the studio where Tom is seated at Anchor, a FLOOR PRODUCER and WRITER feeding him copy.

ANGLE FAVORING BLAIR

As she looks at Jane, poised to control the complicated apparatus

of minds and machines comprising the big time network news. And Jane Craig is at the helm. Blair experiences a flash of emotion which transcends envy and verbalizes it.

BLAIR
(sotto to Jane)
Executive Producer -- wow.

Jane looks at her and, in a moment of atypical merriment, does a choking gesture at her own throat as the monitors flash a graphic reading: SPECIAL REPORT... We HEAR an ANNOUNCER'S VOICE say, "This is a Special Report from..."

INSERT: JANE'S CONTROL PANEL

Each of four buttons labeled so that the microphone can connect her to Tom and the Field Reporters. She presses the button marked "Tom."

JANE
You hear me, Tom? Tom? Tom?
Damn it...He can't hear me...
(to Blair)
I told you if there was one thing...

Tom's VOICE on speakers.

TOM
(voice over; relaxed)
I can hear you. I was just teasing.

Gulping the air in relief, she slumps nonetheless impressed by the macho cool as:

Tom smiles towards her then -- poises himself just as the Announcer's last words clear.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE
(voice over)
...in Washington, Tom Grunick.

He begins his report. He seems authoritative, compelling, even in a low key way. We trust him.

TOM
Good afternoon. A Libyan fighter plane attacked a United States Military Installation early this morning and was, itself, shot down by American F-14 Interceptors.

Another monitor shows the Graphic running. In the b.g. two men approaches Paul. They look out of place, decidedly non-business like.

MAN ONE
Mr. Moore, I'm Marvin Usher and this

is my brother, Stuart.

PAUL
Not now!!!
(gesturing)
Look.

TOM
The Libyan Missile destroyed an Army Warehouse which, just thirty minutes earlier, had been crowded with servicemen. No one was injured.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Aaron is seated, feet up, drinking, listening to MUSIC -- reading a book, two remote controls are on the cushion next to him. He SINGS OUT LOUD with the record as he reads -- at one point providing his own lyric line OVER THE MUSIC.

AARON
(SINGING LOUDLY)
And I can read while I sing.

He picks up the television remote-control device an puts the television on, the SOUND OFF.

ON TV

We SEE the graphic of the Libyan plane's flight route, its missile firing -- the U.S. planes taking off and the shooting down of the Mirage jet... At one point Aaron lowering the MUSIC and raising the TV SOUND hearing Tom.

TOM'S VOICE
(voice over)
The heat seeking missile virtually disintegrated the plane on...

Aaron turns down the TV SOUND and turns up the MUSIC.

INT. BOOTH

Jane's hand flicks at the button marked "PENTAGON."

JANE
George, you're ready.

ON PENTAGON MONITOR

We SEE George and HEAR him through Jane's voice box.

GEORGE
(voice over)
Should I cover everything or should I save something for Tom to ask about?

JANE
Cover everything!

George nods.

JANE
(hitting Tom's button)
We're going to George. Say 'the Joint Chiefs are meeting -- we have George Weln at the Pentagon'.

ON TOM

TOM
George Weln is at the Pentagon where the attack launched by the lone Libyan pilot has resulted in a massive movement of military might.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Where he still balances STEREO and TV SOUND.

AARON
A lot of alliteration from anxious anchors placed in powerful posts.

He picks up the phone.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

As Blair hands it to Jane.

BLAIR
It's Aaron.

JANE
Yes?

AARON
I think the pilot that shot down the Libyan in 1981 is stationed right here. Maybe you could get him -- and maybe Tom should say that our F-14 is one of the hardest planes to fly. They're nicknamed 'Tomcats'.

JANE
Thanks.
(to Tom)
The F-14 is one of the most difficult planes to master.
(remembering)
Oh, you call them 'Tomcats' and in the 70's the first crop had a number of crashes.

TOM
George, isn't the F-14 Tomcat one of the most difficult machines for a pilot to master?

GEORGE
I think you're right -- it's certainly one of our hottest planes.

INT. AARON'S ROOM - DAY

AARON
I say it here -- it comes out there.

He giggles.

TOM
(voice over)
There was trouble with them in the early days -- back in the 70's.

Aaron dials again... As we SEE Jennifer standing at the White House.

AARON
(into phone)
Me again. Hi. Listen Gaddafi doesn't foam at the mouth or anything. When you speak to him he's not at all nuts. He seems like a leader -- very impressive, self-control...that's what's so strange.

ON JANE

JANE
Right and we have the '81 pilot on the way in -- Nobody else will have him.

AARON
(voice over)
You're welcome. Sow how does it feel to...I know you gotta go -- Me too. We're very busy here.

He hangs up -- LONG SHOT... Aaron with his remote controls. The picture switches back to Tom. He turns UP the VOLUME.

TOM
(voice over)
...outlaw nation but strangely those who have interviewed Gaddafi find him, in a phrase we like to use in this country, very 'presidential'.

AARON

Nice, Jane.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Jane is on the phone. The atmosphere buckling with strain.

JANE
(into phone)
Just a minute.

Her finger hits the "Tom" button.

JANE
(to Tom)
To State for the message from Libya, then you'll have the carrier pilot from the Sidra in time to...
(a sudden shriek)
What? No!

ON TOM

Jolted by the shriek in his earpiece but nonetheless continuing.

BACK TO JANE

As she SCREAMS INTO the phone -- this is more than volume, she is over-the-top livid, her face red, neck cords popping.

JANE
We only have ten minutes left -- how can you talk to me about parking problems? No, not you'll try...you'll do it -- do it or I'll fry your fat ass, Estelle. Good-bye.

As she BANGS the PHONE down. Paul comments sotto to Ernie.

PAUL
(sotto)
I had no idea she was this good.

JANE
(hitting Tom's button)
Fill for a second.

TOM
(fluidly)
The latest message seems to indicate that the Libyan pilot was acting on his own without authority from anyone else.
(into camera directly)
In other words, I think we're okay.

INT. STUDIO - EIGHT MINUTES LATER

MOVING CAMERA FROM Tom's left profile TOWARDS HIS RIGHT PROFILE, TAKING IN THE Production Assistant who madly shuffles pages, even as Tom talks on camera, the monitor through which he sees the subject of his interview at the Pentagon, the clusters of a assistants on the floor and now WE CONTINUE TO CIRCLE BEHIND him, beginning to SEE the Control Room in the b.g. and as we MOVE IN TOWARDS HIS EAR, the white ear piece firmly in place, we BEGIN TO HEAR, the barely audible crackle of Jane's VOICE as she tells him roughly what to say and how long he has to say it.

TOM
...So, Commander, it must have been a bit tougher today -- shooting down the French-made Mirage Jet. The one you got was a SU-22...etc...

And NOW ALL IS OBSCURED EXCEPT THE ANCHOR'S EARS, the ear piece and the RED LIGHT on the CAMERA and beyond... almost an abstract vision.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

TOM'S VOICE
...Once again: The Libyan Government has disavowed any prior knowledge of the flight. This has been Tom Grunick reporting from Washington.

The special report ended, Jane breathes a breath -- she and Blair momentarily grasp hands. The first talk concerns Tom.

PAUL
He was brilliant. I've never been as proud of one of my decisions.

ERNIE
(calls back to Jane)
Great work, Jane, really -- You know? Really.

She nods... totally depleted.

JANE
Well, there were no major gaffs anyway.

Ernie scoffs in her direction.

JANE
Thanks, everybody.

She exits the scene.

PAUL
(to the Usher brothers)
This was important for Tom -- there's that bonding thing that happens with the public and an anchorman during a

crisis. It's not the conventions anymore; it's this kind of moment.

Tom enters. He is exuberant.

PAUL
(to Tom)
What a baptismal. Congratulations.

TOM
Thanks. With all the help you get, it's sure easier than local.

Paul and Ernie exchange a glance.

TOM (cont'd)
Where's Jane? I'm still juiced.

Ernie points off... as Tom exits. The Usher brothers hover.

ERNIE
(to the Usher brothers)
Can I help you?

MARVIN
We're here to play the new news theme.

ERNIE
New theme? You don't need me for this.

PAUL
Stay. Why should I be the only one to feel silly?

MAN ONE
We need a synthesizer -- but this will give you an idea.

PAUL
Go ahead.
(to Ernie)
Wasn't he great?

ERNIE
It worked.

Man Two has the keyboard out and begins playing the prospective news theme: a suite meant to have majesty and drive, a towering composition -- the effect of it somewhat lessened by the fact that the two men VOCALIZE OTHER INSTRUMENTS over the keyboard.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

As Tom makes his way across it -- crews are drifting in... He enters Jane's cubby, flushed with the electricity of the "win" the most noteworthy moment of his working life.

INT. JANE'S CUBBY - DAY

TOM
You're an amazing woman. What a feeling having you inside my head.

JANE
(a bit thrown)
Yeah. It was an unusual place to be.

TOM
Indescribable -- you knew just when to feed me the next thing, just a split second before I needed it. There was a rhythm we got into, like great sex.

Jane looks at him and nods slightly -- an unconscious spasm of truthfulness.

TOM
You have to celebrate with me, don't you? Everybody's going to that bar on the corner, 'Caps.'

JANE
I'm going over to Aaron's. Maybe I'll hoop up with all of you later. How long do you think you'll be there?

Tom indicates that it's an impossible question to answer. They enters the elevator.

EXT. NEWS BUILDING - NIGHT

As several people cross the street towards the bar. Tom has been holding back on one question.

TOM
It's tempting to ask you how you think I did.
(she starts to reply)
No. I'm enjoying myself. Take it easy.

He starts across the street.

JANE
(trying to be casual)
Maybe I'll see you over there.

Indicates Bar.

TOM
You'll never show up.

He starts across the street -- then turns and calls to her.

TOM

Jane?

JANE
Yeah?

TOM
I'll wait for you till seven.

JANE
(shouting back)
Okay.

Tom races to catch up with the others -- Jane in the distant b.g. pauses a beat before walking off in the opposite direction. Jane moving quickly along.

SOUND OF MEN VOCALIZING NEWS THEME comes UP AND continues through:

EXT. AARON'S APARTMENT - EARLY EVENING

As Jane approaches and is surprised to find him sitting on the stoop outside.

ON AARON

Happy to see her, rising fairly soberly to his feet. He APPLAUDS as she comes toward him.

JANE
Really? It was good.

He nods and APPLAUDS some more.

JANE
Your calling in that information -- you're the classiest guy I know.

He waves her off... And sits down on the stoop.

AARON
It was strange to watch him. What's the next step? Lip synching?

She sits a step or two above him, waiting to gauge his mood.

AARON
I've been doing some of the most important thinking of my life. I wonder if this is the right time to tell you about it.

She steals a glance at her watch.

JANE
Well, whatever you think.

AARON
I figured out exactly why it is I'm so hung up on getting a chance at weekend anchor...It's because if I do that well, they'll pay me more, treat me great and my life will be better. That's why.

JANE
Sounds like you may be on to something.

AARON
Which means I'm at their mercy and who wants that?...I'm not going to tell you where this thought led me... Anyway, well, why not tell you? -- it's a happy thing. In the middle of all this I start to think about something that does nothing but make me feel good and makes immediate sense and that's you ...And I'll stop here but, Jane, I'd give anything if you were two people so I could call up the one who's my friend and tell her about the one I'm in I...I don't think I should go any further. Come on -- I'll walk you to the corner.

He tales her by the arm and leads her to the corner.

JANE
You know you've had a strange day... I'd sleep on all these things you've been thinking.

AARON
Absolutely...You go have a good time... You have some place to go?

JANE
Yes.

AARON
Good.

He grabs her and hugs her exuberantly -- takes her face in his hands and kisses her full on the lips.

AARON
Well, I felt something.

He leaves her on the corner and walks back.

ON JANE

As the SOUND OF NEWS THEME VOCALIZING PICKS UP ONE MORE... Jane moving quickly, hailing a cab.

INT. CAB - EVENING

JANE
We're going to Caps Bar at Seventeenth and Vermont; Connecticut is clear on Sunday... take that over to Fifteenth, then around Vermont and we'll bypass the circle that way...if you don't go over forty we should catch mostly green lights.

ON the DRIVER'S annoyed look.

JANE
Come on -- don't take it the wrong way. I just know about things.

He hits the meter.

EXT. CAPS BAR - EVENING

As the cab pulls up, Jane gets out and pays him.

DRIVER
Great route. I never made anywhere near that fast before.

JANE
Thanks -- good driving --

DRIVER
Thanks. Coming from you I appreciate it.

JANE
Thanks.

As she turns to enter the restaurant -- Tom and Jennifer exit. As they confront each other:

TOM
I didn't think you'd make it.

JANE
Well, I thought I'd check if all of you were still here. I'll just go in and join the gang and you two go on.

TOM
There's no gang in there -- We were the last ones.

JANE
Well, I'll go in and have a bite.

TOM
(to Jennifer)
Jennifer, you want to have another drink?

JANE
Hey, I know how to have a burger by myself. I feel like a little solitude.

JENNIFER
(as they move off)
I sure know that feeling. Terrific work today.

JANE
(too jock-like)
Right back to you.

TOM
Thanks for getting me through.

He puts his hand behind her neck in an awkward gesture of camaraderie. She awkwardly disengages... waves and steps inside the door to the restaurant... standing there between the two sets of doors watching Tom and Jennifer walk away.

ON TOM AND JENNIFER

As they walk to his car, first exchanging a look of reflection over Jane... then bumping accidentally, then bumping back, a look, then kissing with passion, wrapped around each other.

INT. JENNIFER'S APT - NIGHT

As Tom and Jennifer rush in locked in an embrace, shedding clothes even as they enter.

INT. JENNIFER'S APT - NIGHT

We are aware of MOVING FORMS.

JENNIFER
(intense shout)
Damn all you sons-of-bitches. Oh shit, you bastards...

They finish. A beat, then:

JENNIFER
Sorry.

ON TOM AND JENNIFER

Tom taken aback by the outburst from this woman he's just made love to.

TOM

No, it's okay...People say different things. They do...the plural threw me.

She laughs.

JENNIFER
The last time I was with someone we went through this awful mutual disease questionnaire but I guess it beats getting paranoid the next day. Okay, I'll go first. I haven't...

TOM
(stopping her)
It would never occur to me to worry at all about you.

Jennifer is touched...

JENNIFER
You know something? I'm deeply complimented. Isn't it strange to be deeply complimented because the man you're with doesn't think you have a venereal disease?...

Tom slides out of bed naked -- she moves quickly across the bed one outstretched hand reaching for his ass, a free -- even lusty sort of motion punctuated by her comment:

JENNIFER
Give me some of that.

He dances away -- out of range -- liking the action, a stupid grin on his face.

TOM
Where's the bathroom?

JENNIFER
Through the closet.

He opens the door and turns on the light in the closet.

INT. CLOSET - NIGHT

It is a converted room -- given over the racks of clothes and shoes extraordinarily well organized. Tom stands there agape. Various rain coats -- clothes for all climates -- lots of luggage.

She joins him in the closet -- holding out a sheet in front of her.

JENNIFER
I converted a bedroom -- this

stuff builds up. Wait till you've been doing this sixteen years.

TOM
I'm not knocking it. It's a great solution. Not only the storage but you can see everything you have.

Jennifer laughs -- he follows her gaze and sees himself in silhouette against the door -- his penis prominent in outline.

JENNIFER
Do you do bunny rabbits?

Tom is enjoying himself immensely.

TOM
Isn't this a great date?

We HEAR the SOUND OF SCRATCHING as we:

INT. JANE'S EDITING CUBICLE - MORNING

Jane feeds another tape in -- she is taking editing notes alone and SCRATCHING her arm. She looks worn out -- STOCK FOOTAGE OF STATESMEN move across the small screen. She sighs and, without realizing, implores the heavens to help cure a malady she's yet to recognize in herself.

JANE
(to herself)
God help me.

People have begun to filter into the newsroom in the b.g.

AARON
Jesus, Jane. How long have you been here?

JANE
A long time. I was restless. Will you crack my neck?

He starts massaging her neck as the phone rings. she lets it ring for a beat as Aaron works on her. As she picks up the receiver we HEAR a CRACK. She reacts to it at the same time she utters a greeting.

JANE
Aaah --
(into phone)
-- ello. You sure they said the management meeting?
(hangs up; then to Aaron)

They want me to be at the management meeting.

AARON
They're not that dumb, after all.

He pats her on the back.

INT. WALKWAY - DAY

BLAIR
Do you know you're the second woman in network news history to produce?

JANE
(though distracted)
No, I'm not. I'm the fourth. Joan Richmond. Pauline Fredericks got that credit once on a U.N. special and there's Susan Zirinsky.

INT. MANAGEMENT MEETING - DAY

Paul is running the meeting from behind Ernie's desk. TWO OTHER NON-EDITORIAL MEN are in attendance. As Paul discusses the more pressing problems of the network news division, Jane sits near the window strangely unmoved by her first moment at the seat of power. She has the blues.

PAUL
Anyway, they seem to be very serious about making me out eight million from the budget and that means massive firings. I'm doing everything I can... It's too early to make up a 'death list' but I just wanted you to be aware of the situation... We're also going to cover the Alaskan serial killer trial on a continuing basis. I'd like it done out of Washington which means we've got to get somebody on a plane for Anchorage. We can't fool around anymore...Jane...

She looks up at him -- a bit sleepy-eyed.

PAUL (cont'd)
This is going to be high-profile on the Evening News -- who do you think? George Weln or Jennifer?

JANE
(much, much too quickly)
Jennifer.

The men look at her curiously. She repeats herself more rationally.

JANE (cont'd)
Jennifer.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

He has been reading from a respectable stack of mail -- Jane appears in his doorway. For the first time, we notice that she is woefully ba at at least one endeavor -- flirting.

JANE
Come on, I'll buy you a drink. There's a big thing over at the Italian embassy.

TOM
I'm not sure I'd be good company tonight.

JANE
(self-conscious joke)
I'll be the judge of that.

INT. ITALIAN EMBASSY - NIGHT

As they walk in -- one MAN looks at Tom with a glint of recognition. Then another -- a handshake -- A WOMAN introduces herself. A small knot of people form.

JANE
It's much too soon for you to have this kind of buzz around you.

TOM
Do I have to stand here in the middle and meet them all?

JANE
I'll get you through. Move and smile.
(she pushes him a little)
And smile and move...

They start crossing the room -- he is moving now, making progress. But an EGYPTIAN BUSINESSMAN stops him.

EGYPTIAN BUSINESSMAN
Is it safe for me to fly home?

TOM
Yes. We're fine now.

JANE
AND SMILE.

He smiles -- people smile back.

JANE

AND MOVE.

ANGLE ON STAIR LANDING

Where Aaron (Pimm's Cut in hand -- a cucumber sticking out) stands with Martin Klein. Martin is eating from a huge platter of appetizers.

MARTIN KLEIN
The Italians serve the second best things right after the Chinese...I could do an article comparing Embassy food...Gourmet free-loading...sell it anyplace. I'm sure not getting the assignments.

AARON
Who the heck could that be?

AARON'S P.O.V.

From the excited group of people blocking his view, it's clear there is some personage in attendance.

ON AARON

And now he sees that it's Tom.

AARON
Is God testing me or something?

MARTIN KLEIN
Paul loves him. I heard him give him the most poetic compliment in his command. 'He's hot.' Sometimes groups of executives get together just to say that work back and forth...'He's hot, oh, she's hot. Oh, he's really hot.' Hot-hot-hot-hot-hot-hot-hot...
(looking at Aaron)
And here we are.

AARON
Martin, you're not allowed to use the word 'we' or I'm moving.

MARTIN KLEIN
(sudden thought)
Maybe Jane would like my food idea as a spot...Try the one in the middle.

He moves off to intercept Jane -- as he stops her... Tom is stranded -- then sees Aaron and moves over to his side.

TOM
Hi, Aaron...What's doing?

AARON
Same old stuff. I'm watching a man who won three Overseas Press Awards pitch an hors d'oeuvre idea.

A MAN stops and introduces himself to Tom -- shaking his hand:

TOM
You want to go out there --
(indicating balcony)
get out of this for a second?

AARON
Why don't you lead? I'll just follow the flurry you cause.

Tom turns -- the sharpness of the tone unsettles him.

TOM
What did I do to you?

AARON
You've made my dreams silly.

Tom decides not to deal with the remark. He's jolted by the hostility. He leads the way out French Doors to a ground floor terrace, where Aaron joins him, closes the door and the two men stare at the party.

TOM
(gesturing at the party)
Heavy hitters.

Aaron nods.

They look inside.

AARON
(several beats; then)
How you doing?

TOM
(warming)
Great. Network news, Washington... I love it. What do you do when your real life exceeds your dreams?

AARON
Keep it to yourself.

TOM
You know the other day I really wanted your reaction to how we did with the Libyan report -- I was going to ask but I guess I feel a little intimidated with you.

AARON
Oh, stop it.

On Tom's reaction.

AARON
You can't talk about feeling intimidated when you're on top of the world. It's unseemly.

TOM
I'm not buying into any of that. I have a load to learn. I'm not going to act as if...

AARON
(finishing for him)
You have the job you have...

The sudden debate is important to Tom -- but it's moving too fast for him.

TOM
Shut up a second...

AARON
(amiably)
Okay. Pretty petty party, isn't it, pal?

TOM
(picking his words)
I made one rule for myself when this started and I realized I was going to take a lot from you people because of being from sports...

AARON
And the rule was...

TOM
Never to pretend to know more than I did.

AARON
Can you name all the members of the Cabinet?

TOM
(flustered)
Okay, let's drop it. I didn't mean I'd take a test for you -- I mean if that came up in conversation I'd...

AARON
We're conversing...Oh my, the names

of the entire Cabinet has slipped my mind. What are they?

Tom is getting pissed.

AARON
(compromising)
Don't name them. Just tell me if you know.

TOM
Yes, Aaron. I know the names of the Cabinet.

AARON
Okay.

A beat.

AARON (cont'd)
All twelve?

TOM
Yes.

AARON
There are only ten.

Aaron's suddenly a good deal happier -- damned if it isn't a little infectious.

TOM
You're feeling good, aren't you?

AARON
(sincerely)
I'm starting to... We may do the capitols of the states.

TOM
(dry)
Fifty, right?

Aaron almost smiles.

Tom enters the party leaving the door open.

LONG SHOT

Aaron in the f.g. -- his BACK TO CAMERA... Beyond him Tom being approached... then joining Jane.

EXT. JANE'S STREET - NIGHT

As Tom's car comes to a stop.

INT. TOM'S CAR - NIGHT

TOM
I'm so exhausted. Punchy. Sick tired. I can't think and I can't move. I'm just a dead lump of poured out flesh.
(then)
Would you like to come up?

Tom thinks -- then:

TOM
Maybe we could just sit here -- talk a little?

JANE
Okay. You didn't like the party, huh?

TOM
Too many smart people in one room -- it's not healthy...

Jane's confused by this. She looks at him.

TOM
I'm going to have to do a story from beginning to end on my own.

JANE
Eventually. Does it have to be right now?

TOM
(nodding)
Believe me, I wouldn't be doing this unless it was absolutely necessary. I have an idea for something.

JANE
What?

TOM
I just read about it in a magazine and it affected me.

JANE
Well, what is it?

TOM
If I tell you, can you manage not to put it down or tell me why it won't work or is in bad journalistic taste or anything like that?

JANE
(broadly)
Yes, Tom -- I think I can manage.

He turns towards her -- about to stick his chin out. Hesitates.

JANE (cont'd)
I promise.

TOM
It's about women who are attacked by someone they know on a date... 'Date-rape,' that's the piece... Well?

Jane clamps a hand over her own mouth.

TOM
Okay -- good move. Keep it there.

She continues to clamp her mouth shut as he exits the car, opens her door and then begins to half carry, half pull her out. She keeps her hand clamped over her mouth. Laughing from behind her door and runs for it.

ON TOM

His spirits lifted.

ON JANE

Behind the door, trying to hide the glow in her eyes.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The phone rings... Jane's hand bounces off her nightstand to turn on the light knocking over and breaking the clock radio instead. Three alarm clocks stand next to the clock radio... Finally the light comes on. Jane's voice is so thick with sleep the words she utters are just barely distinguishable.

JANE
Hello.

TO
(uncertain)
Hello?

JANE
Hello...Who is it?

INTERCUT:

INT. TOM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

TOM
I'm not sure I dialed right -- Jane?

JANE

Jane, yes. Tom? Tom, is that you? Is this Tom?

TOM
Yes.

JANE
I had to sleep fast so I took two allergy pills to help me...I'm sorry...Hey, you called me.

TOM
It's not important.

JANE
Says who? Not important -- ha-ha-ha. I was dreaming -- Oh, no -- can't tell -- how embarrassing for me. Gosh.

TOM
What pills did you take? You sound more like someone on a general anesthetic. Maybe I'd better speak to you tomorrow.

JANE
Nooo. Is it your story?

TOM
No. Are you going to the Correspondents' Dinner on Saturday?

JANE
Why, you need me for the story?

TOM
No. Were you going to you?

JANE
Uh-huh.

TOM
Maybe I'll get off work. I'd like to go.

JANE
Oh, good.

TOM
We can go together.

JANE
So you like me, huh?

TOM

I like you as much as I can like
anyone who thinks I'm an asshole.

INT. JANE'S EDITING ROOM - DAY

Tom editing a piece with Bobby -- He also has a little typewriter table set up. He is reading from the page in the typewriter as he looks at the piece he has written.

TOM
(reading)
But cops on the street continue to
view it as...
Shit -- too long. But street cops
say...that fits. That last cut work
for you, Bobbie?

BOBBIE
Yes, and thanks for asking.

INT. NEWSROOM - NIGHT

As the regulars watch the Evening News, in particular the Date Rape piece which is now in progress. Tom anxiously eyeing Jane out of the corner of his eye as she watches the monitor. Her face impossible to read as she studies the screen.

ON MONITOR

UNIFORMED COP
What can you do? If a woman invites
a man in and he says they uh, had
sex and she says he raped her and
then you find out they've been out
together two, three times...how can
you prove a crime?

NEW SHOT ON MONITOR

Tom and a woman of about thirty -- dignified but fragile -- she looks like someone who might be cast for a church production of "Glass Menagerie."

YOUNG WOMAN
It will be a year next month since it
happened...I never thought I'd talk
about it outside of counseling...

ON NEWSROOM

As Aaron enters the scene.

AARON
Hi.

He is shushed by every woman in the room, accepts this and takes up a position near Tom and Jane to watch them.

ON MONITOR

YOUNG WOMAN

We'd gone out twice and I hadn't enjoyed myself that much but it gets to a point -- I don't know if you can appreciate this but where you don't want to sit home or be with your girlfriends and people had always been telling me that I was 'too picky.' I'm not. It's just you want to meet a nice guy...So anyways, it was that 'give-him-a-chance' thing. No, it wasn't. I was lonely. So we went to a movie and when he brought me home he said could he just come up and have one beer and then he'd go. How do you say 'no', to that? So first it was this wrestling match which was awful enough because it got to be really a fight...because I'm a modest person... then he ripped my clothes and he forced me to...make love. He stayed in my apartment and forced me more times -- he didn't leave until...

(she has started to cry)

I promised myself I wouldn't cry... It's just hard not to --

(ruefully)

You sure have a sympathetic face.

(she cries a bit more)

...I was so sure I wouldn't do this -- but the whole thing messed me up -- maybe more than it should...

ON MONITOR

As the news piece cut to: Tom's face -- he turns clearing a tear from his eyes.

ON NEWSROOM

These watching struck -- perhaps embarrassed but riveted. Aaron is aghast. Aaron approaches the set.

AARON

Can I turn on the news for a second? ...Oh, wait a minute. Sex -- Tears -- This must be the news.

Tom stares daggers at him as a public official appears on the monitor.

ON MONITOR

PUBLIC OFFICIAL

I don't think you can overestimate it -- on any given Saturday night tens of thousands of women are being attacked and there isn't much they or we can do about it...

TOM
(on monitor)
The victims often remain too terrified to talk -- the police powerless and all the social welfare groups can finally do is monitor this epidemic of crime without punishment. This is Tom Grunick in Annandale, Virginia.

As his piece concludes.

NEWSROOM

Tom continues to glare at Aaron.

AARON
I'm in a pissy mood. I'm sorry.

TOM
What's wrong with it?

AARON
Nothing. I think you really blew the lid off nookie.

Blair moans with displeasure. Aaron exits scene. Others start to congratulate Tom on the piece -- in the b.g. on the:

MONITOR

We SEE frozen wilderness -- men digging in the ground -- clumps of people watching them work.

ON JANE

Probing her own ambivalence -- or, to be more accurate, working towards a positive stance.

JANE
(to Tom)
Nice work...
(checks watch)
I've got to get a crew off the clock.

She starts off -- Tom stopping her.

ON TOM AND JANE

Now off a bit by themselves.

TOM

So what did you think?

JANE
It moved me. I did relate to it -- I really did. It was unusual for you to cut to yourself when you tear up -- and that might not have been my choice...but it's real and it got me...and I think a lot of the time I'm too conservative about that kind of stuff. Okay?

TOM
(enormously pleased)
Yeah.

He walks back towards the area of the monitor.

ON MONITOR

JENNIFER
Tomorrow the jury returns to this site as each day brings more revelations of horror, four more bodies now taken from the frozen earth...This is Jennifer Mack in Wota Hamlet, Alaska.

INT. NEWSROOM - TWO WEEKS LATER (SPRING) - DAY

BLAIR
Ernie's been looking for you.

As Aaron walks to his office.

INT. AARON'S OFFICE - DAY

As he enters and finds Ernie bent over his desk.

ERNIE
Oh, I was just writing you a note. What do you say we take a walk?

AARON
(puzzled)
Outside?

ERNIE
Yeah --

EXT. WASHINGTON STREET - DAY

Ernie is silent... He's having difficulty. Aaron is feeling knots form. Finally Ernie breaks his silence.

ERNIE
I don't know if we have any younger man more respected in our operation than you.

AARON
Just tell me what's really going on. I think we know each other well enough for me to expect that.

ERNIE
(agitated)
We know each other well enough for me to care how I put something to you which could wipe you out. So I will phrase things the way I think they should be phrased. All right?

AARON
Wipe me out?

Ernie sits on a bench.

ERNIE
Anyway. I want you to think of this as...

AARON
Just blunt talk, okay? I'd really appreciate bluntness.

ERNIE
Upper management thinks you're dull.

Aaron deflates.

ERNIE
Aaron, I've never seen them like this -- I think Paul's nervous about his own job and for some reason he thinks you only appeal to...

AARON
Wait. Bullshit me a little...I'm beginning to appreciate it.

ERNIE
I'm no suggesting the worst will happen...but someone with your brilliance gets nibbles about other jobs and maybe, the next time that happens, down the road -- you should look into it.

AARON
(emotional)
Ah, damn -- the fucking jerks -- My, God. They want to fire me.

ERNIE
All I know is that they've got to

fire a large number of people...
and they're not going by seniority.
There's a recklessness in the air.
They...

AARON
(interrupting)
Do one thing to me? Get me one shot at anchoring the Weekend News -- they've never seen me do it. I think it could turn them around.

ERNIE
I could do it this Saturday -- everyone wants off for the Correspondents' Dinner.

Aaron turns -- his spirit lifted by the unexpected ray of hope.

AARON
Do it then.

ERNIE
Please prepare carefully. This couldn't come at a better time.

AARON
Prepare what? You have Saturday's news handy?

ERNIE
It's been a while since you read the news -- I'll have somebody work with you. Just on superficial performance things.

Several beats.

ERNIE (cont'd)
Please.

AARON
Okay. I think I'd better be alone for a while.

ERNIE
I understand. I'll go with you.

AARON
Thanks.

INT. SMALL TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

Aaron is seated behind a desk -- some old news copy in his hand. An unmanned camera is pointing at him. Tom is standing a few feet further back studying him.

AARON

This is uncomfortable for me -- because, well, I don't mean it as a knock, but we approach this differently.

TOM
We sure do. I don't mean it as a knock either.
(he smiles)
Go ahead. I'll just say what I think and you can disregard it if you want.

AARON
It just might not work for me because of our different approaches.

Tom nods and gestures that he proceed. Aaron begins reading the news. Barely a sentence in, he is interrupted.

TOM
Wait.

AARON
What?

TOM
Your coat jacket is rising up in back.

Aaron ignores the tip.

TOM
When you sit down -- sit on your jacket a little -- that gives you a good line. Look at yourself in the monitor.

Aaron looks but is unimpressed and resumes reading the news. Tom, not about to be ignored when he knows it's important, moves behind Aaron and begins to force his jacket down.

AARON
(very uncomfortable)
I don't like being handled.

TOM
Sit on it! <u>Now</u> look.

AARON
Just don't physically...
(he sees himself in the monitor and is suddenly enthusiastic)
Fantastic tip -- fantastic.

He starts to read again.

TOM
No. That's not going to tell us anything. Let's get this prompter going.

AARON
It's not loaded.

TOM
I'll find some copy. Be right back.

Tom exits -- Aaron looking after him, clearly taken with the genuine camaraderie... the unmistakable joy Tom derives from helping out. Several beats and Tom comes back with a CAMERAMAN in tow.

TOM
I got copy, I got Ellen to heat up the camera and I got Master Control taping so you can study it later.

He puts the roll of copy in the prompter.

AARON
Hey, Tom...

Tom turns.

AARON
I'm very appreciative.

SAME SCENE - LATER

Tom totally focused on him down one knee checking him from various angles. He interrupts. Aaron reading from the prompter.

TOM
No. No.

AARON
No?

TOM
Don't let your eyes go from the beginning of the sentence to the end like that. You don't want to look shifty, do you?

AARON
Oh, God, no!

TOM
And the left side of your face is the good one. Go again. And try to punch one word or phrase in every sentence -- punch one idea a story. Punch -- come on --

Aaron does same with the story he is reading...

TOM
Good...very nice.

Aaron acknowledges the compliment in news mode. Punching the first words.

AARON
Thank you for the compliment, Tom.

He draws a laugh from the Cameraman as he goes right into the next story.

TOM
Try not to move your head or wrinkle your forehead...this is good, very good...

EXT. NEWS BUREAU - NIGHT

Aaron, tape in head, is saying his farewell to Tom. He is facing his left side as he will do for the rest of his life on earth.

TOM
You were smokin' toward the end there.

AARON
The pointers were great. I'll study the tape.

Tom is into helping Aaron he finds himself delivering a locker room pep talk:

TOM
And remember -- you're not just reading the news or narrating. Everybody has to sell a little. You're selling them this idea of you. You know, what you're sort of saying is, 'trust me. I'm, uh, credible.' So whenever you catch yourself just reading...stop and start selling a little. So long.

He moves off -- Aaron watching him go, feeling decidedly uncomfortable by this last piece of advice and vaguely corrupted.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jane FLIES INTO FRAME, carrying her dress, two large shoulder pads clipped to her bra-straps. She is obviously running a little late. Now she slips on the dress -- her pace so quickened that it momentarily dulls the effect of seeing her in a pretty formal gown; the kind good girls wear on special nights. The DOORBELL RINGS... She opens the door while trying to put on her necklace... Aaron enters carrying four bulging garment bags and a fistful

of neckties.

AARON
I spilled some rum on the outfit you picked out. Let me show you the alternates.

She eyes the amount of clothing, goes to the phone and dials.

JANE
(into phone)
Tom...why don't I meet you there? I've got some last minute stuff I've got to take care of...Hey, how did you resolve your dilemma -- did you rent the tux or buy it...I knew it. How much? Wow...Okay...See you there...

AARON
I didn't know you were going with him.

JANE
Did you bring your grey suit?

AARON
Yes...I was thinking that way too... Which tie?

She holds them in her hand -- indicates with the necklace that she wants him to help her... he fastens her necklace while looking over her bare right shoulder as she riffles through his tie collection.

JANE
(the clasp in place)
Thanks. Try this one.

She hands him the tie and he extracts his grey jacket from a bag -- puts it on and ties the tie... She reaches into a white paper bag full of fresh purchases and takes out a vial of perfume with a built-in atomizer and sprays the air in front of hr and walks into the mist. ON Aaron's reaction:

JANE
I read about it -- that's how you can make sure you don't put on too much perfume...

AARON
Could you at least pretend that this is an awkward situation for you -- me showing up while you're getting ready for a date.

JANE
(flaring)

It's not a date. It's co-workers going to a professional conclave.

Jane, unnoticed, reaches into the paper bag, takes a small box of condoms and drops it into her evening bag.

EXT. WASHINGTON STREET - NIGHT

Jane on a public phone, Aaron standing nearby within sight of a taxi stand.

JANE
(on phone)
How long will it tale you to send one?...

She hangs up... paces... Then looks at Aaron, relaxes.

JANE
You look terrific.

Aaron poses a question which he feels in his deepest core:

AARON
Really?

Jane nods.

AARON
Because this is important -- so don't just be polite. I'd really like to look...what's the word I'm looking for?...

JANE
As good as humanly possible.

AARON
Yes.

JANE
Well, the line of the jacket -- No really....just very nice...just right. I wish I could be there.

AARON
Me too...Hey...if it gets dull a little before 11:00, drop by the studio.

JANE
I'm not sure I'll be able to...I...

AARON
If...if not, I'll have the tape...I'll wait for you at my apartment.

JANE
Okay, great -- good luck.

Before she can deal with that, a cab arrives.

AARON
Thanks, Jane. Have a good time tonight.

JANE
You too.

Aaron takes her in -- she looks lovely.

AARON
I'd hug you, but why risk mussing either of us?

She half-laughs... kisses him, wipes the slight lipstick mark from his cheek and, in a sudden decision, takes each of her shoulder pads from her jacket and puts them in his -- improving his look while diminishing her own. She gets in the cab.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Jane, leaning all the way over the front seat, giving detailed instructions to the DRIVER as the cab pulls away... As Aaron turns and walks off.

INT. CAB - NIGHT

Jane, in her formal, sitting back -- anticipating her date.

EXT. WASHINGTON HOTEL - NIGHT

A hefty percentage of the Washington journalism industry's men and women dressed formally for one of those evenings where they can finally assert their own glamour. Jane ENTERS THE SCENE.

INT. WASHINGTON HOTEL - ATRIUM - NIGHT

As Jane enters, lost momentarily in the lobby -- greenhouse, the majority of the throng passing through in formal clothes. A bit of DIALOGUE OVERHEAD from TWO MEN in dinner jackets.

MAN ONE
The L.A. times is a great outfit. Best severance pay in the business.

Jane keeps looking for Tom -- passing another MAN, talking to his SHARP-LOOKING DATE.

MAN THREE
He was lecturing me and finally I just said -- I'm sorry, I refuse to look at it as a negative that I'm young and my news appeals to people my age.

WOMAN

And it's not like he just didn't hire a twenty-six-year-old producer himself.

MAN
No kidding, twenty-six.

Jane moves to the steps and starts up, greeting several people nervously. More bits of DIALOGUE, leaking from conversations of both substance and expedience.

ANONYMOUS OLDER MAN
Remember Brinkley's great line -- "It's as irrevocable as a haircut."

Now, on the second level, she scans the crowd.

JANE'S P.O.V.

The floor below. Tom in the world's best-fitting tux... Clusters of people from around him but he works his way easily through them as he looks for Jane and grins his greetings, men are buoyed, women's pulses throb.

ON JANE

As she silently mouths the words -- "smile and move and smile and move." Which is exactly what he's doing. Then a contract with the gods.

JANE
(to herself)
If he doesn't see me soon, we're not supposed to be together.

ON TOM

Seeing her. -- He does a tap step -- a brief giddy burst, the meaning of which is not lost on Jane. He is acting like her boyfriend.

ON JANE

Anxiety stripped away revealing a first glimpse of Jane as a joyous pretty young woman.

ON TOM

Moving quickly up the stairs -- as she walks toward him.

TOM
(excitedly)
It's incredible who's here.

JANE
Who?

TOM
Me!

She laughs. Almost completes an affectionate gesture -- takes his arm instead.

INT. NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Aaron seated in the main newsroom in shirt-sleeves, writing. He takes the just-completed page out of the typewriter and walks over to the weekend news PRODUCER. (W.N.P.)

AARON
Want to look at this?

W.N.P.
Sure.

George Weln appears...

GEORGE
(to Aaron)
What are you doing here?

AARON
(feigning casualness)
The weekend news...anchoring...
anchoring the weekend news.

GEORGE
Way to go.

Aaron nods, as the Producer finishes the copy.

W.N.P.
This is terrific news, Aaron. It's a pleasure to read.

AARON
Thanks. Oh, there's water on the set, isn't there, in case I get an attack of cotton mouth.

W.N.P.
Sure. You'll be fine.

AARON
(feeling patronized and repelling)
I'll be fine! Yes!! I know!!!

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

Bomb sniffing dogs, SECRET SERVICE MEN and D.C. POLICE monitoring the members of Washington's most trustworthy elite as they pass through the metal detector. The line moves slowly -- Jane and

Tom several couples back.

OFF-CAMERA VOICE
(o.s.)
Can I have your autograph for my wife?

Tom and Jane turn to see a grinning Paul.

TOM
How you doing, Paul?

PAUL
So this is why you wouldn't do the Weekend New, you can't turn down a free meal.

TOM
Yes, born to party.

Paul enjoys the riposte, looks at Jane who is shrinking within herself.

PAUL
I'll see you two inside -- I think we're all at the same table.
(sotto to Jane)
You're finally learning to be flexible. Glad you changed your mind about Tom.

He passes through the detector... Tom starts to step through it -- she pulls him back.

JANE
I'm sorry. I don't want to go in there and sit with everybody.
(imagining it)
I can't...why don't you go?

He considers this option as she waits.

TOM
Suppose I go in for a little while and you wait in the lobby-bar. How's that?

JANE
Good. That's it...See you.

She walks off. He runs a few steps to stop her.

TOM
Jane.

She turns.

TOM
You're not going to take off on me, are you?

JANE

Uh-uh.

She steps on the escalator... Riding upwards, concern deepens, anxiety flows.

ON TOM

Watching her to up the escalator, he finds himself doing simplest thing, stepping onto a moving step.

FULL SHOT

Jane four steps ahead of him -- not yet aware of him. He moves past one other man until he is standing directly behind her.

TOM

I just want you to know that my giving up the Correspondents' Dinner puts tremendous pressure on you.

Jane turns and is a bit blown away by his gesture -- life threatens to be good. And now Jane bumps a bit at the top of the escalator, regaining her balance by grabbing Tom's offered hand. As they walk they continue to deliberately hold hands.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - NIGHT

WE are on the studio floor, FOCUSING on the activity around the Anchor Desk and three cameras... The FLOOR MANAGER stands ready to cue Aaron, the script is ready to roll on the prompter machine.

FLOOR MANAGER

Twenty seconds.

ON AARON

Making sure he is seated on his jacket -- taking one last look at the hand mirror being held by the MAKEUP WOMAN. She starts off -- but Aaron regrabs the mirror almost making her lose her footing -- a check -- then another check -- he points to a spot on his forehead which she dabs with the makeup sponge... Both of them fuss enormously with his hair -- four busy hands.

FLOOR MANAGER

Ten seconds.

AARON

How many?

FLOOR MANAGER

Ten.

AARON

Okay.

He watches the Makeup Woman scurry underneath a camera lens, resits on his jacket and finally has the moment the system has been denying him for years. We can HEAR the END OF HIS CUE in a barely AUDIBLE CRACKLE from the Floor Manager's earphones... "...with Aaron Altman."

AARON
(on TV)
Good Evening...In mood and language better suited to an espionage novel than the delicate world of the Western Alliance, the British Foreign Secretary today pounced on what he termed, 'The nest of profession spies and amateur traitors who were turning NATO Headquarters into an instrument whose only true function is folly.' We begin our coverage with Edward Towne in London.

Aaron looks up -- takes a breath. He's done well -- he's punched his words and his one thought for the story. His gaze has been steady, his voice firm but he has begun to perspire. He dabs with his finger at the first trickles from his brow -- brushes some more prominent sweat from his upper lip... He beckons nervously to the Makeup Woman -- who comes in and dabs -- then dabs again as Aaron feels himself under his arms...

MAKEUP WOMAN
Gee whiz.

FLOOR MANAGER
Five seconds.

She scurries away, Aaron reaching for another Kleenex from her box and missing it... A graphic illustrating his next scripted section appears behind him.

AARON
...the sub-bases referred to are located in five countries...

And now the moisture on his face is clearly discernible -- the Floor Manager and Makeup Woman grimacing at the growing specter as they look at a large monitor.

AARON
France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain as...

And now so much moisture sprouts from his upper lip that he pushes his lower lip out to slurp away the sweat... The Makeup Woman laughs briefly out loud before catching herself... Aaron's eyes dart angrily in her direction.

AARON
We well as Great Britain...Our own

State Department was rocked not only by the revelation but from the highly unusual persistence from the State Press Corps. Martin Klein reports on the ruckus at Foggy Bottom.

Half-beat until he's sure that he's off -- his shirt now showing distinct sweat stains...

AARON
Help me.

The Makeup Woman picks up her Kleenex box -- then thinks better of it...

MAKEUP WOMAN
Someone finds me some big towels.

ON AARON

He blots his face -- some makeup streaked -- by the towel.

FLOOR MANAGER
Five seconds.

ON MAKEUP WOMAN

As she scurries away, this time entering the control room trotting up one stair to look at the monitor... the Director talking to his Camera Operators.

DIRECTOR
I'd go looser but we wouldn't see the graphic.

TECHNICIAN
(to other Technician)
No -- this is more than Nixon ever sweated.

The Makeup Woman now looks at the bank of monitors.

MAKEUP WOMAN
Can't you just die for him?

ON MONITOR

Aaron's makeup-streaked face.

EXT. WASHINGTON STREET - NIGHT

Tom and Jane walking drinks in hand, her arm around his waist. They stop -- he rests a drink on a ledge and boosts her up and then sits next to her.

TOM
You okay?

JANE
Great.

FULL SHOT

REVEALING that they are sitting on an anti-terrorist concrete abutment protecting a major government building on a beautiful night in our capitol. He is still holding her hand -- and now he notes this.

TOM
(loudly to himself)
Why can't I let go of this woman?

JANE
Well...

He interrupts her with the smallest of kisses -- so mall and swift a kiss that she is left doing her return kisses to mid-air. And then he does something he's thought about many times before -- he briefly caresses her breasts -- while continuing to look at her.

JANE
At least kiss me when you do that.

TOM
(a grin)
You just can't stop editing me. Huh?

JANE
This is hysterical.

She laughs a little -- then kisses him. They break -- surprised and aroused and look at each other...

JANE
I was half hoping I wouldn't have a good time tonight. You know why?

TOM
Because you're nuts.

JANE
Right, right -- Isn't she fun to tease?

He leans forward and speaks softly and truly.

TOM
More and more lately when I've watched you in action -- seen all your energy -- I've been

wondering what it would be like
to be inside all that energy.

She takes a gulp of her drink -- puts a hand to feel the heat on her own cheek. Then turns to him.

JANE
Right back at you.

Several beats.

TOM
I don't remember saying anything
like that -- exactly...I don't
know why I just did.

JANE
(immediately at work)
Oh let's see -- wait a minute, well,
I can think of two reasons.

TOM
What?

JANE
Three...I just thought of a third...
If you talk about it, you don't have
to do it.

TOM
That's not it.

JANE
Good...Another is you're trying to
make it all about sex and heat and
nothing else.

She looks at him -- he's thinking.

JANE
Or it's that great feeling that you
don't want to hold anything back.
You know, intimacy.

She elbows him. Tom takes in the choices -- then:

JANE
(suddenly)
Oh, shit. I'm a creep.

She moves off the concrete wall.

JANE
I forgot all about Aaron. I
promised to stop by and see
how he did.

TOM
I'd like to know. I'll go along.

JANE
No. I'll see you at your apartment as soon as I can.

She starts to flurry with activity -- moves to the curb when out of nowhere Tom barks a sharp command, the first time any of his actions has been tinged with fury.

TOM
JANE!

Thrown, she stops and turns. He walks to her.

JANE
What happened?

TOM
Don't run off -- like everything's settled the minute you make up your mind.

JANE
He might be weird -- he can talk more freely if I go alone -- why's that so hard to understand?

TOM
It's not that it's hard. I just want you to give me a minute to catch up.

JANE
Okay.
(she hugs him)
Sorry.
(another beat)
Don't yell at me like that again, you scared the life out of me.

EXT. AARON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As Jane exits a cab and moves up the steps.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

It is at the top of a flight of steps. She KNOCKS on the DOOR. RINGS. KNOCKS. Aaron opens it. He is wearing a sweatshirt and cords.

AARON
I was in the shower.

She enters.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

JANE
How'd it go?

AARON
You didn't see it or speak to anybody?

JANE
No.

AARON
Then it went well.

JANE
Did it really go well?

AARON
Define your terms.

JANE
Do you feel good about it?

AARON
No.

JANE
Do others feel that you did well?

AARON
No.

JANE
Then what was good about it?

AARON
I lost six pounds...

JANE
Aaron, will you tell me?

AARON
It was great...writing my little first rate copy, sitting on my jacket, punching my one thought. But I had this historic attack of flop sweat so they'll never let me another again. Oh, I lost one of your shoulder pads -- how was your evening anyway?

JANE
What do you mean, flop sweat? -- you're making too much out of it...I'll bet you were the only one aware of it...

AARON
People phoned in.

JANE
Stop kidding. I want to know what happened.

AARON
I'm not kidding.

JANE
There were complaining phone calls because you were sweating?

AARON
No, nice ones worried that I was having a heart attack.

JANE
If all that happened, how come you're so chipper?

AARON
I don't know. At a certain point it was so off the chart bad -- it got funny. My central nervous system was telling me something. Jane -- sweat running down my face -- makeup falling into my eyes -- people turning this fusillade of blow dryers on me -- all so I could read introductions to other people who were covering stories which is what I like to do anyway. And I'm chipper because you finally showed up. I thought I'd cook for us. Tequila and eggs sound good?

JANE
I have to be somewhere.

He looks at a clock reading 1:15 in the morning.

JANE
I told what's his name -- Tom -- that I'd meet him.

AARON
Call him -- I mean it can wait, right?

JANE
(now the plunge)
I don't know. I may be in love with him.

AARON

(as if he just burned his hand)
No!!!!!

She starts for the door.

AARON
Don't go.

JANE
This is important to me.

AARON
Yeah. Well...I think it is important for you too. Sit down.

She sits. He walks to a desk and looks at her briefly... Silence.

JANE
What?

AARON
(looking at her)
Let me think a second. It's tough.

A remarkably long silence -- her mind wanders, she takes stock... it is evident that he is straining to get it right, reaching into himself.

AARON
Aaach...Jane...
(glancing at note)
Let's take the part that has nothing to do with me. Let's let me be your most trusted friend, the one that gets to say awful things to you. You know?

JANE
(testy and wary but fair)
Yes, I guess. Yes.

AARON
You can't end up with Tom because it goes totally against everything you're about.

JANE
Yeah -- being a basket case.

AARON
I know you care about him. I've never seen you like this about anyone, so please don't take it wrong when I tell you that I believe

that Tom, while a very nice guy, is the Devil.

JANE
(quickly)
This isn't friendship.

AARON
What do you think the Devil is going to look like if he's around? Nobody is going to be taken in if he has a long, red, pointy tail. No. I'm semi-serious here. He will look attractive and he will be nice and helpful and he will get a job where he influences a great God-fearing nation and he will never do an evil thing...he will just bit by little bit lower standards where they are important. Just coax along flash over substance... Just a tiny bit. And he will talk about all of us really being salesmen.
(seeing he's not reaching her)
And he'll get all the great women.

She is getting pissed.

JANE
I think you're the Devil.

AARON
No. You know that I'm not.

JANE
How?

AARON
Because we have the kind of relationship where if I were the Devil, you'd be the only one I told.

She's briefly impressed. He has a point.

JANE
You were quick enough to get Tom's help when...

AARON
Yes, yes. I know. Right. And if it had gone well for me tonight, maybe I'd be keeping quiet about all this...I grant you everything but give me this...he does personify everything you've been fighting against...And I'm in love with you.

(realizing)
How do you like that? -- I buried the lead.

He pauses to catch his breath -- breathing deeply through his nose.

AARON
(an aside)
I've got to not say that aloud; it takes too much out of me.

JANE
(thawing)
Sit down, stop.

Aaron slumps down -- it's been a long round.

AARON
I've never fought for anyone before. Does anybody win one of these things?

INT. TOM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A CAR DOOR SLAMS in the street below -- he goes towards the window which is blocked by his sofa -- puts his knees in and looks out.

TOM'S P.O.V.

A woman walking from a car.

ON TOM

Momentarily thinking it's Jane. Elated.

TOM'S P.O.V.

It is not Jane. The PHONE RINGS.

INTERCUT:

BACK TO SCENE

As he answers and we have the following conversation between Jane, who is using the phone, with Aaron seen just a few feet away. Tom in his apartment.

JANE
Hi. It's me.

TOM
Where are you?

JANE
I can't get away just yet. I'm at Aaron's.

TOM
Well, when?

JANE
I'm not sure. It seems like he had sort of a mishap on the news.

TOM
I know. I taped it.

JANE
It wasn't as bad as he think, was it? -- it wasn't unprecedented or anything?

TOM
Not if you count 'Singing in the Rain.' Do him a favor and don't treat it like a tragedy. You want me to talk to him?

Her eyes meet Aaron's.

JANE
Uh-uh.
(to Aaron)
He says you could hardly notice it.

Aaron beckons for the phone. Jane hands it to him, as she does so:

JANE
Don't say anything about anything.

AARON
Hi. Will I ever sing again?

TOM
Everybody has one like that. I thought it was great when you started to laugh at the end.

AARON
Yeah -- well, I'm sorry I'm tying up Jane, I didn't realize you two would be going this late. Sorry.

TOM
No. Don't worry about it.

AARON
I'll put her on.

She takes the phone.

JANE

Hi, again. Sorry about...

TOM
No. That sounds more important.
Let's forget about tonight.

JANE
I don't know if that's absolutely
necessary.

TOM
I've got my father coming through
tomorrow anyway. I should get
some sleep.

JANE
(hampered by Aaron's
presence)
Uh-huh.

TOM
I'll see you at the office. Good night.

Several beats of silence. Finally:

TOM
(finally)
Hello?

JANE
Yes.

TOM
Okay. Good night.

JANE
(aghast)
Good night??!

TOM
Jane, I'm not some chore you have
to finish so you can stay on schedule.

JANE
Okay, great, Grunick -- Easy shots
now -- huh? Good night.

She puts the phone down. A beat -- she looks stricken. Aaron looks at her.

JANE
He just cancelled. He had a
chance to think and he
cancelled.

She bows her head.

JANE
I can't breathe.
(aghast)
Over a guy?!?
(then)
But I can't -- I can't breathe.
Damn it!

She gulps a breath. Her hands on her knees, leaning over -- another deep breath. Aaron takes in the specter.

AARON
Well, Jane, it was nice of you to drop by.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

As she enters -- goes immediately to the phone.

ON PHONE...

Cradled in an answering machine -- indexes for sixteen one-button calls, mostly people from work -- "Parents" etc. Jane plays her answering tape. It is silent -- no messages... She fast forwards to double-check. Just the SOUND of blank tape. She pushes the button next to the "Tom Grunick." We HEAR a busy signal.

ON JANE

She hangs up the phone. Then compulsively hits the "Tom" button again. Busy. And again. Busy. She considers for a moment hitting the button next to Aaron's name.

JANE
(stopping herself)
Be fair.

She presses the button next to Tom's name. Busy. And again. Busy.

EXT. ERNIE MERRIMAN'S HOUSE - MONDAY MORNING

As he picks up for newspapers dotting his lawn and opens the door of his car -- just as his wife calls from the door.

WIFE
Ernie, they're calling from work.

ERNIE
Tell me I'm on the way in.

WIFE
It's Paul.

Ernie, just a bit concerned, walks back to his house -- the four newspapers thick enough to be an awkward carry.

INT. ERNIE'S HOUSE

A phone in the immaculate living room.

ERNIE
(into phone)
Hello. Yes...

He holds the phone down at his side for a beat, composing himself in the face of a sudden and horrible turn of events.

ERNIE
Would there be any point to my going to New York and talking to them? Would there be any point in going over it with you? No, I'm still coming in.

He hangs up.

WIFE
What?

ERNIE
They fired me.

She takes his hand and kisses it -- then hugs him.

WIFE
(weeping)
How horrible. We'll be fine. You'll be fine. Stay here with me -- we'll go for a drive, have some drinks, make happy plans.

ERNIE
No. They're firing even more people than they said. Some will want to talk. It could help.

WIFE
(timidly)
I could use somebody to talk to on a day like this.
(on his reaction)
Sorry. Go ahead.

He kisses her sad face.

ERNIE
Bye, sweetie.

WIFE
Okay, sweetie.

He walks towards the door -- picks up his newspapers on the tray beneath the hall mirror and does a start.

HIS P.O.V.

In the mirror he SEES his wife making faces at him behind his back. He EXITS his home without comment.

INT. EDITING ROOM - DAY

Jane is sitting in her editing cubby -- it is past noon. She rises and stands in her doorway looking toward Tom's office -- the door is open, the room is empty. Blair ENTERS carrying an armload of tapes. She looks extraordinary.

BLAIR
I've got four hours of French demonstrations --

Jane waves it off.

BLAIR
Some of it they use water cannons.

Jane takes the tape.

JANE
What are you dressed up for? Oh, that's right -- because the Evening News is here this week.

BLAIR
I spent a fortune on this.

Blair EXITS... Jane pops the tape in, automatically making timing notes, then standing -- looking again towards Tom's door.

JANE'S P.O.V.

The door now closed.

JANE

She stops the tape -- summons herself. She walks towards Tom's

office and opens the door. Tom is seated behind his desk.

JANE
(without passion)
I kept trying to call you -- you never called me. Were you just diddling me? Is that it--? I'm great if I'm helping your career.
(mimicking)
But when I'm a woman for a second, I get immediately fucked around by you.

She is obviously in pain but still alert enough to catch Tom's answer.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE - DAY

TOM
Jane, this is my Dad.

And, now OPENING the door a bit more -- Tom's father is REVEALED seated across from him.

JANE
(that quickly)
Please forgive what I said.
(to Tom)
Sorry.

As she retreats:

TOM
You just light up a room and leave, huh?

She laughs nervously as she exits.

TOM AND HIS DAD

DAD
You want my opinion?

TOM
The thing that's easy to miss about Jane is...

DAD
You want my opinion? And it's okay if you don't.

Tom thinks a beat.

TOM
Yes, I would.

DAD
The way she just acted is not the way an affectionate person acts.

Tom finds the comment off-the-wall enough to be thought provoking.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Paul arriving with Bill Rorish. The first time we have seen the multi-millionaire anchorman in the flesh. He has the grace and dignity of a man who spends every waking moment working on grace and dignity,

He and Paul are in the midst of an important conversation -- muted and ominous.

BILL
Just when do you start, telling people?

PAUL
Almost immediately.

BILL
I'd like to take everyone out after the show.

PAUL
Bill...This is hard on all of us and it's no time for compliments. But I think it's extraordinary of you to come down here for this.

BILL
If we're not here for each other during the tough time, we're not a news organization.

Blair ENTERS scene. The smallest flicker of interest from Bill, but more than enough to justify her going into hock for the outfit.

BLAIR
Welcome back to Washington.

BILL
Thanks.

A self-conscious look of greeting to Paul and she's gone.

BILL
I've forgotten. Was she on the list?

Paul nods "yes."

BILL
This is a brutal layoff...And all because they couldn't program Wednesdays.

PAUL
(can't resist)
You can make it a little less brutal by knocking a million dollars or so off your salary.

AS Bill turns:

PAUL
Just a bad joke. I'm sorry. Awful. It's a miserable day and that was some kind of totally sick-joke

defense mechanism which does not indicate any of my feelings -- not one -- but just shows the kind of stress this represents for all of us.

Tom and his Father ENTER the scene from Tom's office. Bill walks to Tom.

BILL
Hi. It's about time.

TOM
Good to see you, Bill.

AS they shake:

INSERT

A great handshake.

ON MR. GRUNICK'S FACE

touched, as he watches the networks' most prominent journalist greet his son.

TOM
This is my father.

BILL
Good to meet you, sir.

ON TOM

Equally touched as he watches the world's most prominent journalist greet his Dad, who turns goofy with excitement.

MR. GRUNICK
Good-bye, Tom.

He puts a big hand on his son's cheek -- a farewell pat. Then whispers in his ear.

MR. GRUNICK
I'm going to go back home and tell all your old teachers.

Tom watches his father walk off and moves immediately to Jane's editing room.

INT. JANE'S EDITING ROOM - DAY

AS Tom enters...

JANE
I feel terrible about what happened. What did he say?

TOM
He -- uh -- said he liked you because you looked like you had -- fire and honesty.

JANE
(enormously pleased)
No. Did he really?

TOM
Yes. Then he said a really weird thing...

JANE
(so softly)
What?

TOM
(he means this)
That it would be a treat to make someone like you feel better... He gets like that sometimes.

JANE
That's so perfectly...It really makes me feel a little faint...
(actually woozy)
Whooo.

Blair enters wildly into the scene.

BLAIR
They canned me. Well, my brother will feel great -- now he's not the only screw-up.

JANE
It's started.

Bobbie sticks his head out of his office...

BOBBIE
Tom -- Paul wants to see you.

AS Tom focuses and moves off:

INT. NEWSROOM AND HALLWAYS - DAY

Moving with Tom. Nervousness growing, confidence gone, he proceeds down the hallway.

INT. ERNIE'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

SECRETARY
He'll just be a minute.

Tom sits down -- pats his tie in place... A beat and the door

opens. Paul leads out Martin Klein. They shake hands.

MARTIN KLEIN
You know I'm just old enough to be flattered by the term, 'early retirement.'

PAUL
That's wonderful...what a lovely line. If there's anything I can do.

They shake.

MARTIN KLEIN
(evenly)
I certainly hope you die soon.

A little smile to Tom and he's off.

PAUL
Tom.

Tom enters the room. A nervous cough in evidence as he crosses to a seat.

PAUL
We're having a severe cutback, Tom -- 17 people in this bureau including technical personnel and we're going to reorganize at the same time. We're going to take you out of Washington for a while and assign you to London.

INT. NEWSROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Aaron and Ernie are off to the side in the newsroom -- People are packing their belongings -- as secretaries cry and embrace -- from an office rumbles a shouted denunciation:

ANONYMOUS VOICE
No. I won't keep my voice down. Those sons-of-bitches...They are worse than accountants -- they are bad accountants.

Tom enters scene.

TOM
Have you guys seen Jane?

ERNIE
She's in there becoming the first woman bureau chief we've had here.

Tom takes this in.

AARON
What did they do with you?

TOM
They booted me out of Washington.

AARON
Impossible. There's no system that wouldn't value one of us.

TOM
Why? What did they do to you?

ERNIE
(pointing at Aaron)
It's what he did. I'm proud of him.

AARON
They told me they'd keep me because they could plug me into any story and my salary was in line.

ERNIE
The cost-efficient reporter.

AARON
So I quit.

A weeping woman bursts into their circle and sweeps Ernie away. Tom and Aaron stand there -- comrades at last -- victims of the same sword.

TOM
You packing up tonight?

AARON
Yes. And I'm sorry that they're sending you down for a while, but you'll make it back...Where they sending you?

TOM
London.

AARON
(incensed)
London. That's a promotion!

TOM
(defensively)
I don't think so.

AARON
It is. Yes -- that's where they had Rorish, for God's sake, before they made him anchor. I can't stand it -- they're grooming you for it all and you don't even know it.

TOM
Hold it down, okay?

AARON
Can I ask you something? You only had one crew on the date rape piece, right?

He extends his hand.

TOM
Yes. You're not going to stick around for the farewell party?

AARON
No. I don't know how much fun it will be when Martin Klein and Ernie have to drop off their credentials with the security guard.

Aaron looks at people packing their belongings in boxes -- a few pockets of conversation... Ernie reading some copy.

AARON
This story they won't cover. And if the network doesn't cover it -- it must not be important so why worry.

TOM
(eyeing him)
I'm going to miss you -- you're a prick in a great way...

Aaron taken by surprise -- laughs.

TOM
You know what I...

AARON
No, I liked the way it made me sound. Okay. Be good. So long.

He exits.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE - DAY

AS he picks up a clean wastebasket and deposits his belongings. A scheduled book, clean shirt, two ties, cuff-links, a travel mirror, cassettes of his Washington reporting. His desk clear -- he writes on a clean piece of copy paper. He centers it on his desk.

INSERT - PAPER

"Good luck, you'll love the bureau chief... Previous Occupants."

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

AS Tom enters from his office, a wake is slowly igniting. Tom moves along the edge of the room, carrying his wastebasket full of belongings, not really a part of the mournful festivities.

TOM'S P.O.V.

Jane across the room hugging one person after another.

ON JANE

AS she embraces an older secretary.

OLDER SECRETARY
You know what I always wanted to tell you -- that...

JANE
Shhh. This isn't the last time we'll see each other. It's not.

A two-armed tight embrace of Martin Klein.

JANE
We'll get them back -- it's going to change.

Blair is at hand as they embrace.

BLAIR
Except for socially, you're my role model.

And now she sees Tom -- he mouths one word at her -- "London." She nods that she already knows and then lets her body sag a little. He gestures her towards her editing room, so they can rendezvous.

INT. EDITING ROOM - DAY

AS Tom enters and waits for Jane. When she enters he closes the door.

JANE
These people -- it's all so awful. It just hurts physically, doesn't it? Like something's wrong with your bones, like your organs are shifting inside your body.

She looks at him expectantly. It's not what he's feeling.

TOM
Maybe I haven't been here long enough.
(great)

But, hey, congratulations on the promotion.

JANE
How can you say that to me?

TOM
Sorry.
(a beat)
I can't stand here feeing bad that I don't feel worse. This has happened at every station I ever worked for. Look, I think it's crazy for you to come in here tomorrow and start a new job. I have a week to get to my job. Let's get the hell away to some island fast and find out how we are together away from this.

A beat -- Jane takes it in.

JANE
Well, I just think that' an extraordinary proposal.

TOM
That's yes?

JANE
That's more than 'yes' -- that's 'you bet.'

They kiss.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The phone rings. He answers.

AARON
Hello.

INT. JANE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Jane -- still at the office -- it is quite late.

JANE
Bastard, sneak, quitter.

AARON
Speaking.

JANE
I just found out. You didn't say anything to me? You just resign? Will you meet me now? -- No, now! I'm going away tomorrow. Please.

INT. SIDEWALK - RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Across the street from the bureau's building. Aaron and Jane are having a beer. They are in mid-conversation.

JANE
Why not try it for a few weeks?

AARON
Stop. Ernie thought I was good too -- he couldn't help. My agent has a hot prospect -- the number two station in Portland. The general manager says he wants to be every bit as good as the networks. Personally, I think he should aim higher.

JANE
Tell me the God's honest truth -- are you leaving because of me? Because if you are...

AARON
Ernie told this story. How he used to write obits and when the people in town called him up with death notices, he cried. He was till that way when they promoted him out of obits. He says you're lucky if you can get out while you could still cry.
(a beat)
I should have quit this place three years ago.

JANE
You're just trying to say all great stuff so I'll feel even worse that you're not around.

He laughs.

AARON
Let's go...

JANE
I just want to sit here longer, I mean the feeling is powerful -- why's that?

AARON
Maybe the best part of your life is over and you don't want to get up and start the bad part.

Jane looks at him levelly.

JANE

You are now required to sit here with me.

(a beat; then)

Come on...be smart for a second -- what do you think will happen to us?

AARON

Okay, that's very easy. Five, six years from now I'll be in town to collect an award representing the surge in foreign coverage by local stations.

JANE

(smile, it's like old times)

Yes.

AARON

I'll be walking with my wife and two children -- we'll bump into you on the street, my youngest son will say something and I'll tell him...

(deliberately)

...it's not nice to make fun of single, fat ladies.

JANE

You won't be able to stay mad at me, right?

AARON

I hope so...

(on her look he relents)

No. I'm not really mad.

(nodding head as if reciting a catechism)

I'll miss you, we'll talk, we'll always be friends...we'll get hot for each other every few years at dinner and never act on it, okay?

Jane smiles -- Aaron has grown suddenly angry. He rises, walks away, then turns.

AARON

Jane, you know how Tom had tears in the piece the other night? Ask yourself how we were able to see them when he only had one camera and that was pointing at the girl during the interview.

(on her reaction)

I'm fairly sure I was right to tell you.

EXT. OFFICE - NIGHT

We LOOK THROUGH THE WINDOW as Jane enters -- in a frenzy -- searching the stacks.

INT. TAPE LIBRARY - NIGHT

As she locates the cassette labelled "DATE-RAPE - 9/26 - **EVENING NEWS - OUTTAKES."**

INT. TAPE CUBBY - NIGHT

As she inserts the tape into the player.

ANGLE ON JANE... AND MONITOR

As she watches... this is what she sees...

YOUNG WOMAN
...but the whole thing messed me up more than it should.

She cries. We HEAR Tom.

TOM'S VOICE
Okay, that will do it. You okay?

The tape is rocky now -- the Sound Woman and Cameraman continue to roll as they move towards their next shot -- at times the camera pointing towards the carpet -- but the sound continues. The crew chatting -- mentioning that the tape is still rolling.

TOM
That's enough. That's enough.

YOUNG WOMAN
I'm sorry.

TOM
Are you okay?

YOUNG WOMAN
Yes, I'm sorry.

TOM
Don't be silly. What are you sorry about?

YOUNG WOMAN
The way you were looking at me, I just went.

Tom moves through the SHOT.

TOM
I just need you for another minute now, so we can shoot from behind towards me, and, um...

YOUNG WOMAN
Uh-huh.

TOM
...that way we have someplace to go when we cut. And I just sit here, I nod my head and look nerdy.

Young Woman chuckles.

Jane chuckles.

SOUNDWOMAN'S VOICE
Tom

TOM
Yeah.

SOUNDWOMAN'S VOICE
It kills me we didn't have a second camera. It was so powerful seeing your reaction.

TOM
Really?

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE
Yes, it is.

SOUND WOMAN'S VOICE
For a second there, I thought you were gonna cry yourself. That would have been something.

TOM
(considering, then)
Then give me a minute...

JANE
(fully realizing)
You fucking...

As Jane watches we SEE Tom work up the tears we saw in the Evening News piece -- as he does so:

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE
Oh, that's amazing.

ON Jane's shocked reaction:

EXT. BWI AIRPORT - DAY

Jane's cab pulls up to the curb. She gets out -- she is carrying no luggage. She sees Tom who hurriedly walks up to her. Jane is fighting to maintain a calm.

TOM
Look who's the organized one.

I've got everything.

He briefly opens a paper gift shop bag he is holding and shows her he has bought them each a bathing suit.

JANE
I'm not going.

He looks at her with anticipatory distaste evident on his face.

TOM
Why?

JANE
I saw the taped outtakes of the interview with the girl. I know you 'acted' your reaction after the interview.

Tom half turns from her and moves back toward the bench. Jane close behind, stalking him.

TOM
I felt funny about it afterwards. It's verboten, huh? I thought since I did it for real the first time -- but I get you. That's not the reason you're not coming?

JANE
(raising her voice)
Of course it's the reason. It's terrible what you did.

TOM
We disagree on how God-awful it was. Why don't you come with me and we can disagree and get a tan at the same time?

JANE
(livid)
Jesus, if you're glib about this I'm going to lose it. I was up all night and...

TOM
(calmly)
Jane, Jane, Jane, Jane, Jane...

JANE
It made me ill. You could get fired for things like that.

TOM
I got promoted for things like that.

JANE
Working up tears for a new piece cutaway...You totally crossed the line between...

TOM
It's hard not to cross it; they keep moving the little sucker, don't they?

JANE
(distaste)
It just proves that the difference we have are...

TOM
This is a one-way argument. We've got six days; if you go and we fight and we hate it -- we'll come home. If you don't go? Well, that's a much bigger deal. I go to London right after that. So, it'd be very big deal if you stay here. The plane's boarding. You're good at deadline. Here's your ticket.

JANE
(taking ticket)
It's amazing. You commit this incredible breach of ethics and you act as if I'm nitpicking. Try and get this. When you edited that...

TOM
(deliberately)
I'm leaving now. Gate 43.

He simply turns and walks away -- looking back once as Jane stands there mucked up by his sudden departure -- the lack of resolution to their confrontation is palpable.

INT. TERMINAL - DAY

On Tom moving past the metal detector. He too is frustrated -- pissed off at her.

INT. OTHER TERMINAL AREA

Jane moving quickly along towards the metal detectors.

INT. METAL DETECTOR

As Jane passes through and sets off the buzzer. She stands there -- the heel of her hand pressed to her brow trying to stem the tears. As others look on, she takes a huge key ring from her pocket -- deposits it in the box -- walks through without a buzzer and moves on.

INT. BOARDING RAMP - DAY

Tom waiting while in the b.g. "People Eater" busses ferry passengers to the plane.

As one full "People Eater" pulls away and another empty one arrives.

TICKET AGENT
(to Tom)
This is the last one.

Others start to board. He sees Jane moving towards him. He walks to her, she gestures back towards the street.

JANE
That's not going to be the way we say good-bye. Even though I think what you did was rotten -- it's not all impersonal. You mean something to me.

TOM
(interrupting)
You keep coming after me and looking down on me. It's starting to make me batty.

She looks at him.

TOM (cont'd)
I can't help it that they like me. And I like that they like me. And I think there's a lot of this job that I do well. What do you think it takes to do this job -- the way they have it now?

JANE
I don't wan to discuss work.

TOM
Well, let's do a special report on that...I mean that's news.

JANE
I knew what you meant.

TOM
What I don't know, I can learn and what I know, nobody can teach. Excuse me for saying it about myself, but I think it's true.
(old habit)
What do you think?
(catching himself)
Never mind what you think.

They look at each other.

JANE
You're lucky I came after you so you got that off your...

TOM
Yes, I am. Thanks. I mean it.

JANE
It's okay.

TICKET AGENT
Sir?

The pressure begins to bend Jane's resolve.

JANE
So you have an extra bathing suit, huh?

TOM
(wary but hopeful)
You want to come?

JANE
(totally open)
It's just that one of the few things I'm not confused about is what I was saying downstairs, that...

TOM
(giving up -- sadly, finally)
Then you should stay here.

JANE
(softly)
It's better when you let me say it.

He hugs her. Now that it's over, they can each openly care for each other. While in the embrace:

TOM
Take it easy.

JANE
Why did I have to do this to myself? Watch you take off.
(then)
Call me if you need anything.

He kisses her lightly -- looking at her... Then heartfelt:

TOM
Oh, honey.

He walks to the People Eater and gets on, still holding his paper bags of bathing suits. The bus pulls away.

ON JANE

Watching him go.

JANE'S P.O.V.

Tom standing at the front window of the bus -- framed very much as he is when on television.

INT. AIRPORT TAXICAB - DAY

Jane gets quickly into cab.

CABBIE
Good morning.

JANE
Good morning.
(after collecting herself)
Dupont Circle, please.

The cab pulls away.

JANE
Don't take the beltway, because at this time of day there's gonna be a lot...
(stops herself, then)
...Go any way you want.

She sits back in the seat (containing herself) before finally and quietly adding what she knows to be true:

JANE
But New York Avenue's faster.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Much the same place where Jane and Tom first met. The words "SEVEN YEAS LATER" appears on the screen.

A sign off to one side tells us it's the annual meeting of the Local Television Broadcasters... and that at 2 P.M. Tom Grunick will be speaking on "Responsibilities of Broadcast Journalism for the '90s."

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Much the same audience, though two members of the audience may strike particular interest -- curly haired man seen from behind holding a similarly curly haired five-year-old. Tom is in mid-speech.

TOM
... when they told me Bill had decided to retire and offered me the Evening News, I thought it was the same kind of joke we used to pull back at the station -- turning off somebody's prompter in the middle of a show.

Some good-natured laughter.

TOM (cont'd)
And then when they heard my reaction -- they thought I was kidding. I told them I'd be their anchor but I didn't want to be the Managing Editor -- that there were people better qualified than I to control the content and if there weren't we were all in trouble.

The audience really enjoys this:

SAME SCENE -- SOME MINUTES LATER

MOVING SHOT...

The anchor teams -- leaning forward. They love this man, a humble specialist refusing the generalist trap. Imagine the feeling -- you see, on the top of the mountain, a man not unlike yourself.

TOM
And now to something more important... I'd like to introduce my bride.
(gestures to a woman in the front row)
Lila?

A svelte, classic, warm beauty gets to her feet.

ON CURLY HAIRED MAN AND BOY...

Aaron and his son as Aaron cranes for a look at Mrs. Grunick.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGE AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Tom and Lila shaking hand. Aaron, his son in his arms, wait.

ON TOM

As he sees Aaron... he is clearly delighted.

TOM
Holy shit, Aaron.

He claps him on the back... Aaron is as pleased as he is uncomfortable with the attention.

TOM
Lila -- this is Aaron Altman.

LILA
(high British accent)
Oh, yes -- you're one of Tom's 50 or so role models.

AARON
Hi.

TOM
Well, this kid couldn't possibly belong to anyone else. What's your name?

BOY
Clifford...

AARON
(indicating Tom)
Do you know who this is, Cliff?

BOY
The big joke?

Tom looks at him -- Aaron gives his son a disciplinary nudge.

AARON
I'm just bringing him over to give Jane a look at him --

TOM
I thought she'd be here. I'll go with you.

AARON
Okay.

TOM
(to Lila)
I'll see you back at the hotel.

LILA
(cool)
All right.

He starts off. She pulls him back for an urgent communication.

LILA
Tom, the speech was magnificent.

AARON
Oh, I didn't say anything about your speech.

TOM
I appreciate it.

INT. WALKWAY - DAY

Tom, Aaron and the boy walking along. Tom plays with Cliff as they move. The boy is delighted. Jane is in a park -- a blanket spread out -- she is wearing shorts and a top -- she has some wine and a small picnic -- a toy for Clifford.

She HEARS her name being called.

ON JANE

Shielding her eyes from the sun -- now making out Tom. As they reach her.

JANE
(to herself)
Well, why not?
(as they arrive)
Hey, what is this? My life's rushing in front of my eyes.

TOM
A picnic?

JANE
I thought for ol' Cliff here -- Look at you? You're more adorable than your pictures. Look what I got for you.

She hands him a toy.

AARON
What do you say, Cliff?

The boy kisses Jane's hand.

AARON
He excels at gratitude.

TOM
(to Jane)
Are you any closer to a decision?

JANE
I think so...They've been talking to me about being Tom's Managing Editor.

AARON
Really?

JANE
(to Tom)

I'm going to take it.

TOM
What a great surprise. I didn't think we had a chance. I heard you wanted to stay in Washington.

JANE
Well, there's a guy, but he says he'll fly up a lot.

TOM
Well, we should talk. You going to have time for dinner? I'd like you to meet Lila.

JANE
I'm sorry because I was looking forward to that, but I' m going back in a few hours.

TOM
Okay...It's so good to see you.

She gives him a quick kiss. He shakes hands with Aaron.

TOM
(to Aaron)
It's nice to see you.

AARON
Congratulations on history's longest winning streak.

TOM
If you ever get restless in Portland, let me know.

AARON
Why?

Tom shuffles uncomfortably.

ON JANE

Smiling, appreciating Aaron's attitude toward a blandishment of the powerful.

TOM
(to Jane as he leaves)
Bye...boss.

Tom walks away. He's a good twenty yards away when Aaron looks up to see his son running after Tom.

AARON
(calling)

Hey! Cliff! Cliff!

Tom now notices the boy, leans down and pats him.

TOM
(to Clifford)
Go back to your daddy.

The boy starts back.

AARON
Come on, Cliff. Come on.

As Clifford runs back to his father, Aaron sits next to Jane.

AARON
(to Jane)
So who's the guy?

JANE
Well, we met about three months ago.
He works at the surgeon general office.
He loves boating. So, he's been
getting me into water skiing.

Aaron laughs at the very notion of Jane finding water sports a lure. Jane deliberately moves past this moment.

JANE
I like it! So, doll, what about you
lately?

AARON
Well -- my wife got this new job...

He continues to talk. As the two former colleagues catch up, their ease returns, if not their intimacy, as the frame locks and the scene slowly recedes into a black b.g. and we...

FADE OUT.