

# FINAL EDITION

By

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# CAST

ALBERT WALTERS, late 50s, early 60s

PHYLLIS ROSENTHAL , 40s

STEVE BELTON, 30s

GINNY BINGHAM, 30s

HANK , 30s

BRUCE, 20s

CHAUNCEY, 50s, 60s

## TIME

The Present

## PLACE

The news room of a major metropolitan newspaper and the living room of a city townhouse.

## SCENE 1

The living room of Phyllis and Aaron Rosenthal. ALBERT, in his late 50s, is sitting with PHYLLIS, in her 40s. Albert wears a business shirt without a tie, a jacket and pants that have been worn many times too often.

ALBERT

Maybe he won't come tonight.

PHYLLIS

David will come. If not tonight, then tomorrow. Or the next day. But he'll come. He always does when they discharge him from the hospital.

ALBERT

Mrs. Rosenthal, do you think your son...

PHYLLIS

Please, Albert. Phyllis. After so many months coming here, we should at least be on a first-name basis.

ALBERT

Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

I was very suspicious when the Parent's Center called me about what you wanted to do. I didn't think I could trust people who did your kind of work. Now each week I look forward to your visits.

ALBERT

It's very generous of you and your husband to let me be here like this.

PHYLLIS

I like talking to you more than my psychiatrist. You seem more interested in what I say than he does. I sometimes think that my psychiatrist is crazy. It's not easy talking to a crazy person, even if he is licensed.

ALBERT

There were times I thought my psychologist was crazy, but looking back on it I think I was the one who was crazy. Divorce does that to you.

PHYLLIS

Do you have children?

ALBERT

No, that was part of the problem. My work was my whole life. There was no room left for anything else.

PHYLLIS

Is that what your crazy therapist told you?

ALBERT

Phyllis, you keep forgetting how this works. I'm the reporter. You're not supposed to be interviewing me.

She tenses, hearing an off-stage noise.  
Albert goes to the window.

ALBERT (cont'd)

It's a couple of boys playing with a football.

(Seeing her fear)

Will you be here alone tonight?

PHYLLIS

Aaron's never home anymore. Ever since Stockholm he's been in great demand. I think he's glad not to be here when David comes back from the hospital.

ALBERT

The last time David was here, he threatened you, didn't he?

PHYLLIS

Are you interviewing me again? I never know when we're chatting or you're interviewing me.

ALBERT

I'm always interviewing you.

PHYLLIS

You remember all the things I tell you? You never write anything down.

ALBERT

I do after I leave.

PHYLLIS

They only kept David in the hospital for three days this time. That's not enough time.

ALBERT

What does his psychiatrist say?

PHYLLIS

He doesn't have a psychiatrist any more. He moved to Florida.

ALBERT

You haven't gotten another one?

PHYLLIS

How are we going to do that? Our insurance company gave us a list of a dozen psychiatrists. We left messages on their answering machines, telling them how desperate we were, and they didn't even call us back.

ALBERT

That's not right.

PHYLLIS

David should be committed, but they won't let us do that.

ALBERT

He's an adult. You can't force him to stay in the hospital unless he's a clear and present danger.

PHYLLIS

Clear and present danger?

ALBERT

It's a legal term.

PHYLLIS

What does it mean?

ALBERT

You can't commit him to a hospital unless you know he's about to hurt himself or other people

PHYLLIS

I thought he was going to kill me two months ago at his 21st birthday party.

ALBERT

You never told me about that.

PHYLLIS

Aaron didn't want me to. So then I can have him committed.

ALBERT

When did that happen?

PHYLLIS

Two months ago.

ALBERT

You can't commit him unless the threatening behavior happened within the last 30 days.

PHYLLIS

What?

ALBERT

It's the law. That's why they say PRESENT danger.

PHYLLIS

This is beginning to sound like Alice in wonderland.

ALBERT

The law is very clear on this.

PHYLLIS

How do you know all these things?

ALBERT

I've researched it for this story. What did David do to you at this birthday party?

PHYLLIS

I don't want to talk about it.

ALBERT

I think it might be important for this story.

PHYLLIS

We didn't even tell the police what happened that night.

ALBERT

You didn't?

PHYLLIS

It would have killed Aaron if anyone knew.

ALBERT

This is a story about a terrible disease and how the mental health system is failing patients. It's not a story about Aaron. We're not using your names. Anything that could identify you will be kept out of the story. This I promise you, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

I don't know.

ALBERT

After all these months I've been coming here, you don't think you can trust me?

PHYLLIS

The hospital, the police, the courts -- they had all abandoned us. David needs help. He should be committed. Before he hurts someone.

ALBERT

The law won't permit it.

PHYLLIS

So we'll just have to wait? Wait until he comes here and does something awful?

ALBERT

Then you can commit him.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

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## SCENE 2

In black.

## VOICES

Two, four, six, eight, the Telegram discriminates.

Two, four, six, eight, the Telegram discriminates.

## LIGHTS COME UP

On the news room of a large metropolitan newspaper. Conspicuous by its neatness and separated from the rest of sloppy desks by a chest-high glass partition is the desk of the news editor, Steve Belton. Nearby and equally conspicuous by the mountain of newspapers and other things piled high is the desk of Albert Walters.

Three reporters are working the phones. BRUCE, early 20s, is dressed in neatly pressed khaki pants, a blue oxford business shirt and tie. HANK BUXTON, 30s, wears blue jeans and a colorful sports shirt. He is having his shoes shined by CHAUNCEY, in his 50s, 60s. GINNY, mid-30s, is on the phone. Occasionally, a police radio is heard barking orders to unseen policemen and firemen.

## GINNY

(Talking on phone and typing with growing enthusiasm)

Did fire rescue try to use jaws of life to get them out of the car?...How many were killed?...

(Stopping abruptly)

I thought this was a fatal accident...No, sergeant, crippled and near death doesn't count. Thanks for trying.

(Hangs up and dials another number)

BRUCE

(On the phone, typing)

When will the services be held?

GINNY

(On the phone)

Ginny Bingham of the Telegram. Anything doing there?...Thank you very much.

She hangs up and breaks open a bag of Sierra trail food. She looks at Albert's desk with concern.

GINNY (cont'd)

Did Al call in yet?

BRUCE

Not since I've been covering the phones.

GINNY

Steve's going to be pissed when he gets back from his swim.

BRUCE

Al's probably working on that story about the crazy kid. What a waste of time that is.

GINNY

If he gets it, it'll be a hell of a story, Bruce.

BRUCE

It's a thumb sucker. Steve doesn't like thumb suckers.

GINNY

All Steve cares about is feeding the goddamn website.

BRUCE

Al's going to get himself fired if he keeps going missing like this.

HANK

(On the phone as Chauncey shines his shoes)

Thanks for calling, Bill, but I don't do press conferences.

If I don't have it exclusive, I don't want it.  
(Hanging up, he starts reading the newspaper)

CHAUNCEY

Them press conferences are nothing but politicians telling lies.

HANK

You're right, Chauncey.

CHAUNCEY

Don't serve no purpose putting all them lies in the newspaper for people to believe. That's not why we got the First Amendment.

HANK

You're absolutely right.

CHAUNCEY

Money. That's what it's all about. People who got money lying to people who don't got money so they can steal more money.

Chauncey finishes the shine and Hank gives him money.

HANK

You should have been an editorial writer.

CHAUNCEY

Me writing editorials? That would be something, all right. If I was writing them editorials, you know the first one I'd write?

Hank is reading the newspaper and doesn't respond

GINNY

(Caring)

Tell me, Chauncey. What would you write about?

CHAUNCEY

In-eq-ui-ties.

GINNY

You're a born editorial writer.

## CHAUNCEY

Stir the people up. Get them asking questions. Questions about mon-e-tar-y com-pen-sa-shun.

(Indicating the computer terminals)

I'd ask why is it people who sit in front of screens get more than people who sit on shoe boxes. If some guy from Mars came down here and saw you sitting in front of your screen and me on my box, he wouldn't know who to salute.

Chauncey moves to the side of the room where he takes out a copy of the New Yorker from his back pocket and starts reading. Chanting of protestors is heard.

## VOICES (O.S.)

Don't buy a paper that lies.

Don't buy a paper that lies.

## HANK

(Going to Ginny)

They really liked my story.

## GINNY

They were with Hannibal for an hour. They think you're a racist.

## HANK

(Pleased)

With him for a whole hour, huh?

It's because the mayor's black. That's why you wrote the story, they say.

## HANK

Of course that's why I wrote the story. It was a story about black mayors in America.

## GINNY

They think you were saying he wasn't as good as a white mayor.

## HANK

I was saying he hasn't been as effective as our last mayor.

GINNY

Who's white. We've got to be careful about these things.

HANK

What are you saying, Ginny? I should be politically correct?

GINNY

You? Politically correct? It goes against your DNA.

HANK

What are you doing Friday? Want to do something?

GINNY

Friday's exercise night. I never let anything come between me and my exercise.

HANK

A friend of mine can get tickets to Tosca. That tenor you like is singing.

GINNY

I don't have to exercise every Friday.

HANK

Then it's a date. Oh, if by chance my friend can't get the Tosca tickets, you want to go to the Phillies game instead?

GINNY

On second thought, I better exercise. Thanks anyhow, Hank.

HANK

But...

Hank's phone rings.

HANK (cont'd)

Shit.

(Running to get it)

Hank Buxton. Yeah, Bill. They really got you working tonight...yeah...so the mayor's shacking up with someone. That's not news. That's sleaze... It's sleaze until a politician makes an issue out of it. Then the sleaze is news. Who's the woman?

(A beat)

No shit.. I didn't know the mayor had it in him... I can't go anonymous with something like this, Bill. We don't destroy mayors without attribution... So give me the details.

(Starts scribbling on a yellow pad)

STEVE, 30s, fit and neat, walks in with a gym bag. All eyes turn to him. He's dressed like Bruce -- khaki pants, blue oxford business shirt and a tie. He goes to his desk, takes out a wet bathing suit from his bag and hangs it neatly on a coat hanger. He sees that Albert is not at his desk. He marches over to Ginny.

STEVE

Where the hell is Al?

GINNY

That's a mean crowd out there.

STEVE

Did he call in?

GINNY

Guess they didn't like Hank's story. But you were right in running it.

STEVE

You think so?

GINNY

It took a lot of courage.

STEVE

Yeah, well, you know. You calls them the way you see them. Features gave your breast cancer story a nice play.

GINNY

It should have been on One. Prostate cancer always gets on One. You know why breast cancer never gets on One?

STEVE

Why?

GINNY

Because the white males who run this place don't have any breasts. Or balls either.

STEVE

(Putting his hand on her shoulder)

Ginny, it's not a gender thing.

(Seeing her pointedly staring at his hand)

What's wrong?

GINNY

You hand.

STEVE

What about it?

GINNY

It's on my shoulder.

STEVE

Oh, God, not this sex harassment stuff again.

GINNY

Is that what you're calling my distaste, Steve. Sex harassment stuff?

STEVE

I was trying to be friendly. Tell me something, Chauncey. Would it bother you if I put my hand on your shoulder?

CHAUNCEY

Hey, look. I'm not into that sort of stuff.

STEVE

Ginny, as medical writer I have a question to ask you? It's about heart disease. It's not likely that an athletic person who exercises regularly could have serious heart disease without knowing it, is it?

GINNY

What'd you say your cholesterol level was?

STEVE

I didn't say.

GINNY

Last month you spent a whole night talking about it after you got the test results back. The news room was getting up a pool on when you'd have your first heart attack, but the women reporters thought it was in bad taste. Amusing, but in bad taste.

STEVE

I'm sorry I asked your advice. Where's Al?

GINNY

He's out on a story, isn't he?

STEVE

He's not supposed to be out on a story. He's suppose to be here, sitting at that desk, doing night rewrite. This guy hasn't got the message. He's not a star anymore.

(Takes out an iPhone and types)

GINNY

Then why don't you tell him? Isn't that in your executive job description somewhere, setting all the has-beens straight?

STEVE

If I hear about the Siamese twin story and all the awards he's gotten one more time.

GINNY

A classic story. When I read that story I knew I was working with one of the greats.

BRUCE

I didn't think it was so good. It was much too long.

GINNY

You never should have gone to journalism school.



Steve heads back to his desk. Taking out a handkerchief, he wipes down the face of his computer. He dials a number and talks on the phone. Hank goes to Ginny.

HANK

Guess who the mayor's shacking up with?

Bruce moves closer to hear.

GINNY

I have no interest in that kind of sleaze, Hank. Who?

HANK

Suzette La Fete.

GINNY

Queen of the topless dancers?

HANK

None other.

BRUCE

You should get that on line right away.

HANK

I want it for the paper. I don't give a damn about your electronic journalism.

BRUCE

It's the only way to reach and please the modern reader.

HANK

I didn't become a reporter to please readers.

BRUCE

Steve understands these things.

HANK

Go away, Bruce. You're depressing me again.

Bruce returns to his desk.

GINNY

You going to write a story about that?

HANK

Does a bear shit in the woods?

GINNY

I thought you liked the mayor.

HANK

What's that got to do with anything?

GINNY

It's his personal life.

HANK

Public officials don't have personal lives.

Hank returns to his desk, gets La Fete's address from his computer and dials a number. Ginny starts working on her story. Albert strides into the news room.

ALBERT

Good evening, everyone. And a beautiful evening it is. The sky's filled with stars and the air smells as sweet as concrete just after a spring rain.

GINNY

Keep it down, Al. Steve's on the warpath.

ALBERT

The city's skyscrapers sparkle in the night. A million little dramas behind every window.

He sits down at his computer and starts typing rapidly.

GINNY

Something nice happened to you.

He smiles, continuing to type.

GINNY (cont'd)

Your crazy kid story is going well.

ALBERT

The poor bastards have a crippled, demented animal for a son.

GINNY

That's wonderful, Al.

ALBERT

The mother is terrified of him. So terrified that she wants him committed to a mental hospital. But she can't do it because of the law.

GINNY

Why's she so terrified? What'd he do to her?

ALBERT

I can't find that out. It must have been something awful to make her as scared as this.

GINNY

Has he attacked her physically?

ALBERT

I think he did, but she won't tell me. She thinks it's only a matter of time before he does something awful.

GINNY

This is going to be a hell of a story.

ALBERT

I know. But I don't feel good about it. It's like they're tied up, lying on railroad tracks, and a train is racing towards them and all I can do is watch.

GINNY

God forbid that something really bad happens to this woman. But if it does, it would be a great climax to your story. You can show the kid getting more menacing with each passing day, and then bang he does it.

Steve hangs up.

STEVE

(Calling out)

Walters. I want you here immediately.

ALBERT

Oh, Christ. Is he doing his tough-news-editor bit again. Yeah, Steve, in a minute.

STEVE

I said now.

Albert keeps typing.

STEVE (cont'd)

Walters.

ALBERT

(Going to Steve)

Yes, Steve. What's up?

STEVE

You're on night rewrite.

ALBERT

I know.

STEVE

It's eight forty-five. You're supposed to be here.

ALBERT

(Facetiously)

What's wrong? Did I miss another big story?

STEVE

That's not the point.

ALBERT

Just what is the point, Steve?

STEVE

(Standing and pointing)

The conference room.

ALBERT

Oh, for god sake.

They exit to the conference room.

HANK

It's not good when Steve takes you into the conference room.

GINNY

I can't stand seeing Al treated this way.

HANK

He can't take this shit much longer. It's just a matter of time. These bastards have more ways to force you to quit.

GINNY

Like being assigned to night rewrite.

HANK

They would have fired him long ago if it wasn't for the union.

GINNY

They're just waiting for some dereliction of duty thing that justifies dismissal under the contract. But Al's too smart for that.

HANK

So they force him to quit by humiliating him. The union doesn't mean shit. If I was Al, I'd just quit and be done with it.

GINNY

Newspapers are his whole life.

BRUCE

His kind of journalism is dead. His stories are too complicated.

GINNY

Some of the things we write about are complicated, Bruce.

BRUCE

Nowadays no one has time to waste on these epics.

GINNY

Ten minutes is too much time to read about something important?

BRUCE

Ten minutes! Do you realize how many tweets you can read in ten minutes.

HANK

All of life's mysteries revealed in 140 characters.

BRUCE

This is the digital age. Al refuses to accept it. None of you accept it.

Bruce goes to his desk.

GINNY

I don't know what'll happen to Al if they force him out. Newspapers don't hire reporters as old as he is.

HANK

They want kids like Bruce, straight out of J school. They can get them cheap.

Hank's phone rings.

HANK (cont'd)

(Answering it)

Hank Buxton... Yes, Mrs. La Fete, thank you for calling back.

Ginny brings out a yogurt and starts eating it with a spoon. Albert enters from the conference room, smiling, followed by a very somber looking Steve.

ALBERT

What the hell is happening to this business? We eat yogurt and spend all our time worrying about cholesterol.

GINNY

Is everything OK?

ALBERT

Steve's just having a bad day.

GINNY

You weren't in there very long.

ALBERT

We were talking about the merits of punctuality. There wasn't much to talk about.

HANK

(On Phone)

We're doing a story on the mayor and his relationship with you...he's an elected official and the public has the right to know...We're doing the story if you comment or not...I couldn't do that. We don't pay for interviews. That would be unethical.

Albert's phone rings. Lights come up on the Rosenthal living room. Phyllis is on the phone

ALBERT

(On phone)

Albert Walters.

PHYLLIS

(On the phone)

Did you just call, Albert?

ALBERT

(On phone)

No.

PHYLLIS

(On phone)

The phone was ringing, but I didn't pick it up. I thought it was him.

ALBERT

(On phone)

It wasn't me. Did Aaron get back?

PHYLLIS

(On phone)

He just came back. He hasn't said a word since he got home. He's just sitting there.

ALBERT?

(On phone, starts taking notes)

Where?

PHYLLIS

(On phone)

In the kitchen. He won't take his eyes off the back door. Albert, I'm worried. Aaron bought a gun.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

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## SCENE 3

Rosenthal living room. Albert and Phyllis are talking.

ALBERT

Where's Aaron?

PHYLLIS

He left.

ALBERT

Didn't you tell him that I wanted to speak to him?

PHYLLIS

That's why he left.

ALBERT

He doesn't want to talk to me?

PHYLLIS

He's not happy that you're doing this story.

ALBERT

I thought he was all for it.

PHYLLIS

He's changed. Ever since the birthday party. And now this.  
(Showing him the gun)

ALBERT

I didn't think Aaron liked guns.

PHYLLIS

He hates them. He's always refused to have one in the house. But now because of David.

ALBERT

Is it loaded?

PHYLLIS

Yes.

ALBERT

That's very dangerous.

PHYLLIS

He said we have to protect ourselves.

ALBERT

This makes me very uncomfortable. David could end up being the one using it.

PHYLLIS

I've never seen Aaron so angry. He's turned against our son.

ALBERT

He's been through so much. All of you have.

PHYLLIS

Aren't we supposed to love our children unconditionally.

ALBERT

Can you still love David?

PHYLLIS

I know I should. I think I do.

ALBERT

You're not sure?

PHYLLIS

Unconditional means nothing your child does can stop you from loving him. I used to believe that.

ALBERT

Maybe you love him differently.

PHYLLIS

That's not what I'm saying. I mean not love them at all. But then I say to myself. It's not David who's doing these bad things. It's the disease. Do you blame a blind man for not seeing?

ALBERT

It's hard to separate the person from what the person does.

PHYLLIS

Aaron's given up. David isn't his son anymore. He's the enemy. That's why he could buy a gun.

ALBERT

I wish you could get rid of that thing.

Something smashes through the window.  
Phyllis screams.

ALBERT (cont'd)

Get back from the window.

Albert rushes to the window and looks outside.

ALBERT (cont'd)

They're gone.

Albert picks up a sock. He pulls out a rock.

ALBERT (cont'd)

It's a rock.

He feels something else in the sock. He pulls out a memory card for a voice recorder.

ALBERT (cont'd)

What the hell.

PHYLLIS

David was always playing with those things.

ALBERT

It's a memory card for a voice recorder.

PHYLLIS

It's from David.

ALBERT

He's sending you a message.

PHYLLIS

He has to do it this way? He can't talk to me like a normal human being?

ALBERT

He's trying to scare you.

PHYLLIS

Why?

ALBERT

Why does he do any of the things he does? It doesn't make any sense to us but it makes perfect sense to him.

PHYLLIS

After all that's happened, what could he say that would scare me more?

ALBERT

Do you want to listen to it?

PHYLLIS

No.

ALBERT

All right.

He starts to put it in his pocket.

PHYLLIS

But he might be saying something nice.

ALBERT

If he's saying something nice, why would he do it like this?

PHYLLIS

He's so ashamed and he's embarrassed. This is his way of saying I'm sorry.

ALBERT

Then you do want to hear it?

PHYLLIS

Yes. I didn't think David would have the courage to apologize.

Albert puts the memory card into his voice recorder and pushes the play button.

DAVID'S VOICE ON RECORDER

Hello, Sainly Mother. You thought you could get rid of me by sending me to the loony bin. But it didn't work.

PHYLLIS (cont'd)

Oh.

Albert stops the recorder.

ALBERT

Have you heard enough? It doesn't sound like he's about to apologize.

PHYLLIS

Let me hear the rest.

He restarts the recorder.

DAVID'S VOICE ON RECORDER

They sent me home because I'm not loony. You're the loony one. You think that reporter can help you destroy me. But he's fooling you. All he wants is a story for his newspaper.

PHYLLIS

How does he know you're here? Only Aaron and I know about you.

ALBERT

He must have heard us talking.

PHYLLIS

You think he's here, in the house?

ALBERT

He must have been.

PHYLLIS

He might still be here.

(Yelling)

David. David. Where are you?

She rushes out and her voice yelling for David can be heard.

PHYLLIS (O.S.) (cont'd)

Where are you hiding?...You don't have to hide from me...David. David.

She enters distraught.

PHYLLIS (cont'd)

What's he doing? What does he want? Why is he hiding like this?

Albert takes her in his arms.

ALBERT

Now, now, Phyllis. It's all right. He's gone now.

PHYLLIS

You don't know that. He might still be here in the house.

ALBERT

He had to be outside to throw the rock through the window.

PHYLLIS

Yes, of course. You're right. He had to be outside.

ALBERT

Are all your doors and windows locked?

PHYLLIS

I always lock them.

Albert starts checking all the windows and doors, making sure they are secured.

ALBERT

What about the kitchen?

He exits.

ALBERT (o.s) (cont'd)

He must have gotten in here.

Albert enters.

ALBERT (cont'd)

The back door was ajar.

PHYLLIS

I'm sure I locked all the doors.

ALBERT

Does David have a key?

PHYLLIS.

He might.

ALBERT

Call the locksmith now.

PHYLLIS

Yes, yes. I must change the locks.

ALBERT

I'll stay with you until Aaron gets back.

PHYLLIS

He won't come back until you leave.

ALBERT

I don't want to leave you alone.

PHYLLIS

He's across the street with our neighbor. He'll see you leave. Then he'll return.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

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## SCENE 4

The news room later that night. Steve is working his computer. Hank, Bruce and Ginny are talking.

HANK

(Referring to Bruce)

Our friend here is having second thoughts about print journalism.

BRUCE

If you had it to do all over again, would you go into newspapers, Hank?

HANK

No, I'd get an honest job.

BRUCE

Like what?

HANK

Investment banking.

GINNY

Oh, come on.

HANK

They admit they're only out for the big buck. That's more than this fat-cat business will do.

Hank exits.

BRUCE

Hank's living in the past. There aren't any big bucks in newspapers any more. In another 10 years there won't be any newspapers.

GINNY

Won't that be a shame.



BRUCE

A lot of the big names are moving from print to blogs. We're all crazy to stay with print journalism.

Bruce goes to his desk. Hank enters, carrying two cans of soda. He goes to Ginny.

HANK

Thought you might like some apple juice. That is your favorite, isn't it?

GINNY

I love apple juice.

HANK

Why are we fighting like this, Ginny? We just have an honest difference of opinion. What I'm trying to say is that I understand how you might not like the La Fete story.

GINNY

That, my friend, is an understatement.

HANK

I got a lot of good stuff from La Fete on just what happened in the mayor's office. Can you believe he was getting a blow job in his office. While his constituents were waiting outside to see him. What I need now is something about La Fete -- where she grew up and how she got into the topless business.

GINNY

It's not a nice story you want to write.

HANK

What I hear you saying is that you don't like my story. I want to thank you for taking the trouble to tell me this. I'm glad you shared it with me.

GINNY

Are you in therapy or something?

HANK

I'm just trying to say thank you.

GINNY

(Softening)

Cheers.

They toast.

HANK

Cheers.

GINNY

(Indicating the Coke in his hand)

All that sugar is not good for you, you know?

HANK

I liked your breast cancer story. It should have been on One.

GINNY

You think so?

HANK

Definitely. You've written a lot about breast cancer, haven't you? I remember all the great stories you did when La Fete got her mastectomy.

GINNY

(Becoming suspicious)

Yes.

HANK

You got to know her pretty well, didn't you?

GINNY

Nice try, Hank.

HANK

All I want to know is...

GINNY

I want nothing to do with that story.

Albert enters. Steve watches him with disapproval.

STEVE

So kind of you to honor us with your presence.

ALBERT

I got tied up with something, Steve.

STEVE

Check with Murph at police headquarters. Some woman got hacked up with a machete because her boyfriend had an issue with her. Only need a brief. It's in the projects.

ALBERT

Sure, Steve, my pleasure to serve.

GINNY

You really ought to tell him about that story you're working on.

ALBERT

I don't have it yet. There are too many unanswered questions.

GINNY

Like what?

ALBERT

I still don't know why the Rosentals are so terrified of their son.

GINNY

Didn't you say he was violent?

ALBERT

Verbally. That's not enough to explain why his father would buy a gun for protection. Something else has happened, something so terrible the mother isn't telling me.

GINNY

Tell Steve that. Tell him you're working on a great story, but there are a few unanswered questions.

ALBERT

Why are you pushing me on this?

GINNY

He's keeping book on you. Every time you're late I see him typing something in his iPhone. The union won't be able to protect you if you consistently come in late without justification.

ALBERT

I'd hate to make it so easy for the bastard.

GINNY

Then tell him.

ALBERT

You really think that's what he's doing?

GINNY

That's exactly what he did with Charlie. Kept book on him and then fired him for coming in late. The union couldn't do a damn thing.

ALBERT

The bastard.

(Calling out)

Yo, Steve, there's something I wanted to talk to you about.

STEVE

Later, after you give me the brief.

ALBERT

(Going to him)

I'm working on a story that could be really big.

STEVE

That's not what you're supposed to be doing.

ALBERT

I'm doing most of it on my own time.

STEVE

All I want from you is that brief.

ALBERT

For the past couple of months, I've been following this family with a mentally ill kid. Twenty-one years old. He's becoming increasingly violent.

STEVE

He kill anyone yet?.

ALBERT

They want to commit him, but the hospitals keep discharging him.

STEVE

Has he hurt anyone?

ALBERT

Certainly psychologically. His parents are terrified.

STEVE

So what's the story?

ALBERT

They've turned to psychiatrists, hospitals, even the justice system and can't get help anywhere.

STEVE

So?

ALBERT

So this family is a beautiful illustration of how the mental health system is failing completely. Instead of just using boring statistics, we'd be telling the story through this family.

STEVE

It's not a story until this kid does something bad.

ALBERT

He is doing something bad. The disease is destroying this family.

STEVE

How long have you been working on this story?

ALBERT

Five or six months.

STEVE

You spent that much time on one story?

ALBERT

The story is unfolding slowly and I'm there watching.

STEVE

I'm glad you've been watching it on your own time. Now do something useful and get me that machete story.

ALBERT

But, Steve, listen...

STEVE

I'm not interested.

Albert returns to his desk.

ALBERT

So much for full disclosure.

GINNY

Did you tell him?

ALBERT

I tried to.

(Dialing a phone number and speaking)

Hey, Murph. Steve wants you to give me the machete story...Yeah...Yeah...Yeah. Does she bleed to death in the bedroom or in the hospital?...Yeah...How old? And the assailant?...That's all I need. Steve only wants a brief.

He hangs up. Bruce is standing behind Hank, reading the La Fete story over his shoulder.

HANK

So, what do you think, Bruce?

BRUCE

It's a hell of a story, Hank. It's got at least an 80 RAP score.

HANK

The what?

BRUCE

The RAP. The Reader Approval Panel.

HANK

What the hell is that?

BRUCE

Its an algorithm that evaluates stories on the basis of how many hits they'll get on the internet.

HANK

I don't care about that shit.

BRUCE

It's the future, Hank.

HANK

It's bullshit. Is an 80 the top score?

BRUCE

No, a hundred is.

HANK

And my story is only an 80?

BRUCE

That's what I estimate.

HANK

How the hell do they score these things?

BRUCE

It's a function of the story's elements and how they affect each other. Sex plus violence plus deceit times name recognition. Your story has all of the elements except violence. It'd be worth a hundred if the mayor had raped La Fete.

HANK

That RAP stuff is bullshit.

ALBERT

Can't you guys keep it down. I'm working on a very important machete murder.

GINNY

Hank got a tip that the mayor is sleeping with someone other than his wife. Supposedly Suzette La Fete.

HANK

Not supposedly. La Fete just told me the whole story.

ALBERT

That woman is incredible. She turns whatever happens to her into a public relations coup. How many women could get their mastectomy onto One?

GINNY

How many women would want to get their mastectomy onto One?

HANK

This isn't a flak job.

ALBERT

After the story, men were flocking to her topless dance place.

HANK

I had to talk La Fete into admitting she gave the mayor a blow job in his office.

ALBERT

Is that what she did?

HANK

See, Ginny, even Al wants to know more. Just like all our readers will want to know more.

ALBERT

She willing to go on the record?

HANK

Yes.

ALBERT

By name?



HANK

As a well placed source close to the mayor.

ALBERT

You can't argue with that.

STEVE

(Calling out)

Hey, Walters. Where's the machete story?

ALBERT

I'm just sending it.

STEVE

Pick up on three. A stringer in Bucks County with a sewer assessment story.

ALBERT

Sure, Steve. My pleasure.

(Into his phone)

Hello. This is the sewer assessment desk. How may we help you? This phone call is being monitored for training purposes and quality control. Anything you say may be written down and published.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

5

5

## SCENE 5

The news room is dark except for a light at Albert's desk. He is working at his computer. Ginny enters.

GINNY

You're still here.

ALBERT

I had a few ideas that I wanted to put into the computer before I forgot them. What are you doing here so late?

GINNY

I was downstairs getting a little drunk with Hank when I remembered I left my computer up here. I've never seen the news room dark and empty like this.

ALBERT

Everyone's gone and it's too early for the cleaning people.

GINNY

This place gets cleaned?

ALBERT

Believe it or not.

GINNY

It's never really clean.

ALBERT

It's too damn clean. Looks more like an insurance office than a news room. When I started in this business, the desks were piled high with newspapers, discarded styrofoam coffee containers, big paper boxes with half eaten pizzas.

GINNY

This you miss?

ALBERT

We weren't called journalists back then. We were news men. And I mean men. No women in the business, except for the women's section.

GINNY

That must have been a shocking discovery -- that women knew how to read and write.

ALBERT

City rooms are so quiet now. Not like when I was starting as a copy boy. They're not even called city rooms anymore. It was so exciting back then. Hard-drinking reporters, smoking cigarettes and stomping them out on the floor.

GINNY

On the rugs?

ALBERT

There were no rugs. Reporters would be banging away at their typewriters, the sound growing to a roar as the deadline approached and the room filled with a haze of smoke. Copee. Copy boy. The reporters would yell. And we'd run to them, get the page they'd just written and rush it over to the editors. You don't need copy boys now. Just push the "send" button. And instantly, electronically, the story appears on the editor's screen. Everything is changing so fast. Now we work in a smoke-free environment, eat yogurt, drink Perrier and feed the internet.

GINNY

Are you going through a male menopause or something?

ALBERT

The first paper I worked on was the New York Herald Tribune. What great writers that paper had. William Henry Maxwell. Ever come across that byline?

GINNY

A lot of his stories are used in J school.

POLICE RADIO

Seventh and Rising Sun Avenue. Reports of gunfire and blood curdling screams.

ALBERT

Best newspaperman there ever was. I remember how Mr. Maxwell -- that's what everyone called him, Mister Maxwell -- would gather all the copy boys around his desk and talk to them about newspapering. You don't make much money, he'd say. And the hours are awful. But, damn, you'll have fun, and maybe even do a little good.

GINNY

When was that?

ALBERT

Some time in the 70s. My God, 40 years I've been a newspaperman. Forty years. What were you doing 40 years ago?

GINNY

I beg your pardon.

ALBERT

Of course. You weren't even born. I didn't want to be a newspaperman at first. I wanted to be a playwright. Write the great American play. But I didn't have the guts to live without a paycheck.

GINNY

You can still write the great American play.

ALBERT

No longer an option I'm afraid.

GINNY

Sure it is. You just have to go and do it.

ALBERT

That's one of the saddest things about growing old -- losing options, losing possibilities. Every day we're losing possibilities but don't realize it. Like playing ball with the Phillies. When I was a kid that was the grandest and most wonderful, most exciting possibility in my young life. Playing with the Phillies.

GINNY

I guess that option is gone.

ALBERT

I used to play ball all the time. Every afternoon. Every weekend. And then one day I walked up to the plate like I had ten thousand times before and swung at the ball for the last time.

(He swings and looks sadly at his imaginary bat)

What a sad day that would have been had I known at the time. Kind of like making love with someone for the last time. You don't know it's the last time until a long time afterwards.

GINNY

With the losers I've been with, even as it's happening I know it's the last time.

POLICE RADIO

Fifth and Lehigh. On the highway. Victims of small arms fire.

ALBERT

It seems like only yesterday I was a copy boy, listening to Mr. Maxwell talk about the good old days. Now I'm the one telling young reporters about the good old days -- how we used to write stories on typewriters and then tell them what a typewriter is. The last time I write a news story. I wonder if I'll know it at the time.

GINNY

Forty years. Isn't that something?

ALBERT

When I was your age, I wanted to change the world. I still do, goddamnit.

GINNY

We don't change the world, Al.

ALBERT

You can't measure it, but things would be different without us.

GINNY

We don't make a damn bit of difference any more. Maybe we never did. The politicians manipulate us. The public hates us. Elections are determined by spin doctors and sound bites, not by what we write.

ALBERT

You don't want to change the world?

GINNY

Yes, I do. That's why I'm thinking of changing careers.

ALBERT

You're not thinking of doing like Bruce and...

GINNY

No, of course not.

ALBERT

I feel like I'm on a sinking ship and everyone is running for the life boats.

GINNY

I want to get a job in philanthropy. There you can see the good you do.

ALBERT

Naming buildings after rich people.

GINNY

At least I'm not selling out.

(No response)

Completely.

(No response)

I'll have an impact.

Albert shrugs his shoulders.

GINNY (cont'd)

Oh come on, Al. Don't give me that holier-than-thou shrug.

ALBERT

I was just shrugging.

GINNY

It was a holier-than-thou shrug and you know it. This place is still nothing more than a crowded, messy, ugly room. Last night I saw a rat in this place.

ALBERT

He works here.

GINNY

I don't mean Steve.

ALBERT

One big story and your juices will start flowing again.

GINNY

You're such a romantic old fool.

ALBERT

Old fool?

GINNY

I didn't mean that kind of old.

ALBERT

There are other kinds?

GINNY

You're just a fool.

ALBERT

I'm feeling pretty old with all the young people they've been hiring. The kids know the internet more than we ever will. We can do so much more with the internet, but I do miss the way things used to be.

GINN

You ever think of giving it up? Doing something else?

ALBERT

I've toyed with the idea.

GINNY

What would you do?

ALBERT

I think I'd do what you just told me to do. Go out and do it -- write the great American play.

GINNY

You wouldn't give up writing?

ALBERT

That's all I can do. That's all I've ever wanted to do. I knew, even when I was just a kid in grade school I'd be a writer.

GINNY

And you became a newspaper man.

ALBERT

I wanted to be a playwright but I didn't have the courage to risk it. The romantic life of a starving artist didn't appeal to me. I had to have a paycheck. In the end everything turned out for the best. I love this business.

GINNY

You can still say that with Steve riding you like this?

ALBERT

He's young. A corporate man, all caught up with the internet. He thinks all stories must be short enough to read on your iPhone even as it's happening. Someone has to show him how good a long read can be.

GINNY

If anyone can show him, you're the one person who could. It's amazing the stories you've been able to get.

ALBERT

I've been very fortunate.

GINNY

How do you get your sources to open up so much?

ALBERT

Getting them to trust me. Hank likes to bully or scare people into revealing things they're trying to hide. It takes a lot longer to earn their trust, but I think I get more with my way. Though it does create problems.

GINNY

Like what?

ALBERT

You have to protect your sources from themselves. They come to think of you as their best friend or their therapist. Because you do what good friends and therapists do. You listen.



So they open themselves up, make themselves vulnerable because they think they're safe. You can't let them hurt themselves.

GINNY

You keep out damaging stuff?

ALBERT

Some times.

GINNY

Even if it'll weaken your story?

ALBERT

I wouldn't do this with politicians, who're always trying to manipulate us. But the people I write about are doing me a favor, letting me into their lives.

GINNY

What would you do if the only way to protect them was to kill the whole story you worked so hard to get?

ALBERT

That's never happened.

GINNY

But if it did, would you kill the story?

ALBERT

I hope I'm never put to that test.

Hank enters.

HANK

(To Ginny)

There you are. I thought you got lost.

(To Albert)

What are you doing here so late?

ALBERT

Working on my story.

HANK

They're giving the last call for drinks downstairs.

GINNY

I'm going to have to call it a night, Hank. Got to get up early tomorrow morning.

HANK

I'll walk you home.

GINNY

You don't have to do that.

HANK

It'd be my pleasure.

GINNY

I'll be fine, Hank.

HANK

It's no trouble.

GINNY

I'll be fine. Night, Al.

ALBERT

Night, Ginny.

Ginny exits.

HANK

Why are you spending all this time on a story that Steve's never going to publish?

ALBERT

Because it's a good story.

HANK

It's more than that. You don't spend all this time doing a story on your own time just because it's a good story. It's because of all this shit with Steve. That's why you're doing it.

ALBERT

Sometimes you have to take matters into your own hands. I haven't gotten a decent assignment in over a year, ever since they bought the paper and sent that bastard down here to clean house. He's got me doing work you give to reporters just beginning or ending their careers. All these new editors they've hired think I'm a has-been.

HANK

That's not true, Al.

ALBERT

No, Hank, they do. This story I'm working on is turning out to be one hell of a story. I've gotten access like I've never had before. This could be the best story I've ever done.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE 6

The news room a few days later. Ginny, Chauncey and Hank are talking.

## POLICE RADIO

Eighth and Butler. Parking lot. Family dispute. Proceed with caution. All parties armed with automatic weapons.

## GINNY

The radio won't let up. There must be a full moon.

(Going to the window)

Oh, look at that moon, Chauncey.

(Chauncey joins her at the window.)

## CHAUNCEY

Waste of money.

## GINNY

You can almost touch it.

## CHAUNCEY

Twenty-threec billion dollars. They had no business spending money like that on the moon with all the problems we got right here on earth. You people never wrote about that.

## GINNY

Full moons are better than eclipses because they're so unexpected.

## CHAUNCEY

Became a bunch of cheer leaders for the astronauts, the media did. That's what Tom Wolfe said in *The Right Stuff*. Hungry people could have used that money.

## HANK

You stop harassing that woman, Chauncey.

## CHAUNCEY

I'm not harassing her. We're talking about the moon. I'm flirting with her.

HANK

Why do you work here so late every night?

CHAUNCEY

What else I got to do?

HANK

I think you love this place.

CHAUNCEY

What are you talking about? I'm here shining your shoes. You know why I'm shining your shoes?

HANK

Because they're dirty?

CHAUNCEY

Because of my father.

HANK

I thought it was a trick question.

CHAUNCEY

I curse him for what he did to his three sons. He told us to be honest. If everyone here was honest, this room would be full of shoe-shine boys.

Steve enters, sees that Albert is not at his desk, and makes a note on his iPhone.

HANK

Newspaper people are the most honest people in the world.

Ginny gags on the statement.

GINNY

Sorry. My throat got caught on a nut.

HANK

A free press. Democracy's watchdog.

CHAUNCEY

Your watchdog isn't worth a damn. Wouldn't have gotten into the Iraq war if your watchdog was doing its job.

HANK

I admit, it wasn't our proudest moment.

CHAUNCEY

A free press belongs to the man who owns one. Read that in the New Yorker.

HANK

You read the New Yorker?

CHAUNCEY

What else I got to do sitting on my box everyday? You got to educate yourself. The people in charge. They don't want you to be educated. That's why they make the public schools so bad. Keep the people ignorant.

GINNY

You're not too far wrong on that one, Chauncey.

CHAUNCEY

Democracy's watchdog. That's a laugh. The man isn't going to let you write anything he don't like. It's his newspaper.

HANK

But it's my story. The man doesn't tell me what to write.

CHAUNCEY

He don't have to. You think like him. That's why you got this job. You...You... I'm looking for the word. In-ter-na-lize. You internalize his thinking into your thinking. You think you're thinking for yourself, but he's already done the thinking for you.

HANK

And you know what I think?

CHAUNCEY

What?

HANK

I think you'd rather be here than with your family. You do have a family, don't you?

CHAUNCEY

I've got a wife. My kids are in graduate school.

HANK

You could afford to send your kids to college?

CHAUNCEY

Had to do something with the big tips you guys give me.

Chauncey chuckles.

HANK

What's so funny?

CHAUNCEY

I've been hanging around here for 10 years and this is the first time anyone asked me if I got a family.

Chauncey exits as Albert enters and sits down at his desk.

ALBERT

Sorry I'm late.

STEVE

(Making a note on his iPhone.)

I'm sure you are.

He points to the conference room. Albert gets up with a sigh and they go to the conference room. Focus shifts to the conference room.

STEVE (cont'd)

What do you think you're doing?

ALBERT

I don't know what you mean.

STEVE

Coming in late like this all the time.

ALBERT

I'm not coming in late all the time, Steve.

STEVE

(Consulting his phone)

Last month you came in here late six times.

ALBERT

Six times?

STEVE

You're supposed to work a seven-and-a-half-hour day. That's what your union contract says.

ALBERT

I didn't miss that much time.

STEVE

(Consulting his phone)

Thirty-seven minutes. That's your average. You doing that just to piss me off?

ALBERT

You know I'm working on that story.

STEVE

You're not supposed to be working on a story. You're supposed to be here, doing night rewrite.

ALBERT

The story's reaching a climax.

STEVE

I'm tired of hearing about that story.

ALBERT

The mental health system is a shambles. We've got to write about this.

STEVE

We've done the mental-health-system-is-bad story again and again.



ALBERT

With statistics. We don't write about the families that are being destroyed. We have to show the public, the politicians, what it's like for a family to be dealing with serious mental illness. We have to make them feel the pain and suffering these families are enduring.

STEVE

And that's what you think you're going to do with this story of yours?

ALBERT

I can bring the reader right into the home of one of these families and show them what it's like to have a violent, mentally ill child.

STEVE

Where does this family live?

ALBERT

Society Hill.

STEVE

Black?

ALBERT

In Society Hill?

STEVE

What's the father do?

ALBERT

I can't say.

STEVE

You don't know?

ALBERT

I know. But I can't use it in the story.

STEVE

What do you mean you can't use it in the story?

ALBERT

It might identify the family. I promised them anonymity.

STEVE

You can't do that.

ALBERT

They wouldn't talk to me if I couldn't guarantee them that.

STEVE

You don't make deals like that.

ALBERT

It doesn't matter who they are. They represent the problem.

STEVE

You got to have names.

ALBERT

They told me stuff they never would have revealed if they knew their names would appear in the paper. Deeply personal things. That's why this story will be so moving.

STEVE

You don't have shit. Stop wasting your time and get in on time.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

7

7

## SCENE 7

The Rosenthal apartment, a little while later. Albert and Phyllis are sitting opposite each other. Phyllis' arm is in a sling.

ALBERT

What happened to your arm?

PHYLLIS

I sprained it.

ALBERT

How'd that happen?

PHYLLIS

It just happened.

ALBERT

You trip on something?

PHYLLIS

Something like that.

ALBERT

You didn't just trip, did you?

PHYLLIS

No.

ALBERT

Did David do that to you?

She doesn't respond.

ALBERT (cont'd)

Did he?

PHYLLIS

It was Aaron.

ALBERT

An accident?

She doesn't respond.

ALBERT (cont'd)

Did he hurt you on purpose?

PHYLLIS

We were fighting. Over this.

(Taking out a memory card)

It was in the mail. Aaron wanted to destroy it.

ALBERT

Another memory card. So David's found a new way to torment you.

PHYLLIS

I told Aaron we have to know what he's telling us. Aaron wouldn't listen. We don't have a son, he said, and he grabbed my arm. I pulled away and yelled at him. We do have a son and he's talking to us. He grabbed my arm again. I thought he broke it.

ALBERT

That doesn't sound like Aaron. He's not a violent man. I know Aaron doesn't want to talk to me but it's important that he does now.

PHYLLIS

He won't talk to you.

ALBERT

I just have a few questions.

PHYLLIS

He just sits there in the kitchen, looking at the door. He doesn't talk. He doesn't listen to music any more. He doesn't read. Day after day he sits there. Silently. Waiting for David to come. I'm so alone, Albert. I lost my son. Now I've lost my husband. Our friends have stopped coming to our home. You're the only one I'm close to.

ALBERT

It's terrible what this disease is doing to all of you.

PHYLLIS

We were such a happy family. Aaron was so excited by the discoveries they were making in his lab. David was an honor student in high school. He was accepted by two colleges, Ivy League colleges. The future held so much promise for all of us. But David was changed when he came back from college.

ALBERT

What happened to him in school?

PHYLLIS

A mental health crisis. Too much stress, the doctors said. When he came home, he got more and more violent. He'd yell. Never at Aaron. Always at me. He'd scream at me. Call me names. Terrible names. Awful names. And then that disgusting birthday party. That's when Aaron changed.

ALBERT

Could one night be so awful that it has terrified both of you so much? That it has turned Aaron against his own son?

PHYLLIS

Some things about the people you love, it's better not to know.

ALBERT

It's not David. It's the disease that's doing this. Don't you remember saying that?

PHYLLIS

I'm not talking about David.

ALBERT

Oh.

PHYLLIS

Aaron's not a physically strong man. This isn't what attracted me to him. It was his mind. He made me feel protected. But he didn't protect me.

ALBERT

What happened that night?

Phyllis shakes her head.

ALBERT (cont'd)

Talking about it might help you deal with it.

PHYLLIS

You sound like my psychiatrist.

ALBERT

It's painful to keep bad thoughts like this bottled up inside.

PHYLLIS

Are you asking me this for your story?

ALBERT

I told you, Phyllis, everything we talk about is for my story.

PHYLLIS

It would destroy Aaron if people knew what happened.

ALBERT

No one will know who it is.

PHYLLIS

What good does it do, writing about this?

ALBERT

It will help many other people, who have gone through things like this with their children. They'll know that they are not alone.

PHYLLIS

I don't know.

ALBERT

I know I'm asking a lot of you to trust me like this.

PHYLLIS

I trust you, Albert. I know you'd never hurt me. But you have editors and they could force you to reveal our names.

ALBERT

No one could or would force me to go back on my word.

PHYLLIS

You've done this before?

ALBERT

Yes.

PHYLLIS

And they didn't try to force you?

ALBERT

Never.

He waits, letting Phyllis appreciate what he's just said.

ALBERT (cont'd)

It was a surprise birthday party and?

PHYLLIS

The doctors had told me that David was doing much better. I was so excited. I thought maybe we'll get through this after all. He was coming home from the hospital on his birthday and I wanted to do something special. So I baked him a cake. The cake had his name on it. Happy 21st Birthday, David. I put the cake on the table in the middle of the living room. David walked into the room, saw the cake and smiled. It wasn't a happy kind of smile. It was sinister. It scared me. I said happy birthday, David. And he said, you're a fucking whore.

ALBERT

He said that?

PHYLLIS

He yelled, all my life you've been fucking me with your bullshit. Such awful words. Whore. Bitch. Cunt. He threw me to the ground. Ripped off my blouse. My skirt. I screamed. Aaron. Aaron. David slapped me and wouldn't get off of me. I tried to push him away. Scratch him. He grabbed me in awful ways. Then I realized what he was doing. He was trying to rape me. Aaron. Aaron. Please. I yelled and cried.

ALBERT

Aaron stopped him?

PHYLLIS

No. He was standing in the corner of the room crying. David finally got up, looked down at me, and said it again. You fucking whore. He looked at Aaron and laughed. And laughed. And laughed. Then he walked out. Aaron came to hug me. I turned away. I didn't want him to touch me.

ALBERT

Do you know why Aaron did nothing?

PHYLLIS

David had a knife. Aaron said he was afraid he'd use it on me if he tried to stop David.

ALBERT

Did you go to the police?

PHYLLIS

Aaron wouldn't let me. He said the police would ask questions. Questions we wouldn't want to answer. Putting him in jail wouldn't have changed anything. The damage had been done.

ALBERT

I'm worried for you and Aaron.

PHYLLIS

What more could he do to us?

ALBERT

God knows what's going through his sick mind. David is up to something. That's why he keeps sending you these memory cards. He's trying to scare you. He wants you to anticipate the bad things he's going to do to you. Maybe Aaron is right. Maybe you should destroy these cards.

PHYLLIS

I can't turn my back on my son.

ALBERT

You can say that now?

PHYLLIS

I'm his mother. He's calling out for help. In a twisted way.



ALBERT

I don't think so, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

He is. I want to hear what he's saying to me.

She offers him the memory card. Al  
hesitates.

PHYLLIS (cont'd)

Please.

Albert inserts the memory card into his  
voice recorder.

ALBERT

You're sure you want to do this?

PHYLLIS

He's still my son.

Albert pushes the play button.

DAVID'S VOICE

(On memory card)

I know you're trying to destroy me with that reporter. I thought you'd  
learned your lesson. But I guess I'm going to have to discipline you again.  
See you soon, mommy dearest.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

8

8

## SCENE 8

The news room. Steve is talking to Hank, who is standing at his desk. Albert is wearing earphones, listening to his voice recorder. Ginny is eavesdropping with displeasure on Hank and Steve.

HANK

The mayor is stonewalling on this.

STEVE

We can't run it without a comment from the mayor or his office. But start writing it anyhow.

HANK

How long?

STEVE

Fifteen inches.

HANK

He's the mayor of the fifth largest city in this country. He got a blow job from the owner of a topless lounge. We've got it exclusive. And all you want is 15 inches?

STEVE

Twenty inches.

Ginny goes to Steve.

GINNY

You're running the La Fete story without checking with Hannibal?

HANK

Hey, Ginny, butt out.

STEVE

What's Hannibal got to do with this?

GINNY

(Indicating the window where the chanting had been coming from)  
He was meeting with them again. All afternoon.

HANK

This story has nothing to do with race.

GINNY

It's up to you, Steve. Like you always say, you're the night news editor. It's your paper once they've all gone home. Go ahead and print this story about our African-American mayor having sex with the topless queen of Philadelphia. Show Hannibal who's boss.

Steve dials the phone.

HANK

Is this any of your business?

GINNY

What you're doing, Hank, is not right.

STEVE

(On phone)

Hello, is Hannibal there?...Could you have him call the office as soon as possible. Thanks.

(Hangs up)

Start writing it, Hank.

(Looks at his screen)

I like the way your story is shaping up, Ginny.

GINNY

Have you got my story up on your screen?

STEVE

Nice lede.

GINNY

You know I don't like you reading over my shoulder like that.

STEVE

I was complimenting you.

GINNY

I'm putting the story on my private queue. I'll send it to you when I'm ready.

Steve's phone rings. He answers it.

STEVE

(On phone)

News Desk.... Yes, Hannibal. We've got a situation here I wanted to run by you.

Focus switches to Ginny and Albert while Steve talks on the phone.

GINNY

(To Albert)

Does it bother you when he's got your story on his screen and is reading it over your shoulder?

ALBERT

I don't give him a chance. Everything I write is on my private queue.

GINNY

Must bug the hell out of Steve.

ALBERT

I don't put it on my open queue until it's finished.

Focus switches back to Steve and Hank.

STEVE

(Hanging up)

We're holding the story.

ALBERT

You just said you wanted 20 inches.

STEVE

I've changed my mind.

HANK

But the Trib...

STEVE

Hannibal said hold it.

HANK

Until we get a comment from the mayor?

STEVE

He's killing it, Hank. And I agree with him.

HANK

(Muttering)

What else is new?

STEVE

He doesn't like raising this kind of issue on election eve. The mayor doesn't have time to defend himself. That's why Bill leaked the story now.

HANK

Who said Bill leaked this?

STEVE

He did, didn't he?

HANK

Sorry. Got to keep my sources confidential. I thought you wanted 20 inches.

STEVE

The mayor's sex life is not relevant to his job as mayor.

HANK

It's a character thing. If he's willing to lie about something like this, then can you trust him on anything?

STEVE

Lying about your mistress is considered the polite thing to do.

HANK

What the hell is happening here? Is Hannibal letting a handful of pickets push us around?

STEVE

We're killing the story. And that's that. Hey Walters. Where's my weather brief?

ALBERT

I'm working on it, Steve.

STEVE

How long does it take you to write a brief?

ALBERT

You want your weather brief?

STEVE

Yes, Walters, that's what I want.

ALBERT

All right.

He writes the brief with a flurry of typing.

ALBERT (cont'd)

There, Steve. There's your goddamn weather brief.

Steve's phone rings. He answers it.

STEVE

(On phone)

Yeah, Murph... You're sure it's him?... Son of a bitch. Give your notes to Hank.

(Calling out)

Hey, Hank. I'm switching Murph over to you. The Penn professor who won the Nobel. His son just shot him. We need this for the early metro.

ALBERT

David shot Aaron?

GINNY

Isn't that the family you've been following?

ALBERT

I told her something like this would happen. I told her to get rid of the gun.

STEVE

Bruce, see if you can get the phone number. Aaron Rosenthal. He lives in Society Hill.

BRUCE

Sure, Steve.

GINNY

(To Albert)

You probably just left the place.

ALBERT

I shouldn't have left her with that gun.

GINNY

What could you have done?

ALBERT

I could have done something.

GINNY

You're a reporter. An observer. Not a participant.

ALBERT

I know.

GINNY

Do you realize the story you're sitting on?

ALBERT

Yes, I think I do.

GINNY

Aren't you going to tell Steve that this is the family you've been following.

ALBERT

All in due time, my dear. All in due time.

Albert sits back and listens with amusement.

HANK

We've got it all wrong, Steve. The kid didn't shoot his father. It was the other way around.

STEVE

Ginny check your sources at the hospital. Find out if the kids going to die before the final.

GINNY

Right.

(To Albert)

I can't wait to see his face when you tell him.

She dials her phone.

CHAUNCEY

(To Albert)

What's all the excitement.

ALBERT

Some kid got shot.

CHAUNCEY

So what. That happens every day.

ALBERT

This isn't the projects. It's Society Hill.

CHAUNCEY

What's the difference?

ALBERT

About \$100,000 a year.

CHAUNCEY

Shooting poor people isn't news?

ALBERT

Don't start with me, Chauncey. You're preaching to the choir.

CHAUNCEY

Until the right person comes along, the choir is all I got.



LIGHTS FADE and come up again,  
indicating a passage of time. Steve is  
looking at Hank's story on the screen.

STEVE

This is good, Hank. But you don't have why he shot the kid.

HANK

We haven't been able to find that out.

STEVE

It's a big hole in the story. Why would a father, a Nobel Laureate, try to  
kill his own kid?

HANK

We're trying to find out.

STEVE

What about the wife?

HANK

We can't get to her. She's locked up in her house. And they won't let us  
talk to her

Albert's listening to this with amusement.  
He goes to Steve.

ALBERT

Could I speak to you for a moment?

STEVE

I'm busy.

ALBERT

It can't wait.

STEVE

Talk to me after deadline.

ALBERT

Now. I've got to talk to you now.

STEVE

Damnit. What is it?

ALBERT

This is the family I told you about. The family I've been following.

Steve looks at him with shock.

STEVE

The family with the crazy kid?

ALBERT

That's why I was late today. I was with them. Now that's someone's got shot I guess it's finally a news story.

STEVE

You've been with them all this time?

ALBERT

Six months.

STEVE

Son of a bitch.

ALBERT

I could see it building up to something like this.

STEVE

Then you must know why he shot the kid.

ALBERT

His son is mentally ill and violent.

STEVE

That's why he tried to kill him?

ALBERT

The violence was getting to be too much for the father. He felt he had to protect himself and his wife. So he bought a gun.

STEVE

You know he bought a gun?

ALBERT

I was there the day he brought the gun home.

Steve's phone rings. He answers it.

STEVE

(On phone)

News Desk... Yeah, Murph... When?... I'll switch you over to Hank.

(Switching him over)

The kid's dead.

ALBERT

Oh, no.

STEVE

You have enough stuff for a side bar?

ALBERT

I have enough stuff for a five-part series.

Steve's phone ring.

STEVE

(Answering the phone)

News Desk... Yes, Hannibal. We're on top of it... TV's got it all wrong... It wasn't an accident... The kid was mentally ill and violent. We think the father shot him on purpose.

ALBERT

No, Steve.

STEVE

(On phone)

It's more than a tip. I've had Al Walters following the family around for the last six months. We were going to use the family for a story on the failure of the mental health system.

ALBERT

You son of a bitch.

STEVE

We've got all sorts of detail. We'll put some of it in tonight's story and I think we should come back Sunday with a day-by-day account leading up to the shooting. Walters was even there when the father brought the gun home...Two full pages at least...Thank you, Hannibal.

Steve hangs up.

ALBERT

I wish you hadn't told Hannibal that.

STEVE

Why the hell not?

ALBERT

I have an agreement with the family. I promised I wouldn't identify them in the story.

STEVE

So what?

ALBERT

I can't break my word.

STEVE

Are you telling me that you have all this stuff and you can't use it?

ALBERT

Unless I can get an OK from them to use their names.

STEVE

You don't need an OK.

ALBERT

I made an agreement.

STEVE

You can't make agreements like that.

ALBERT

It's the only way they would talk to me.

STEVE

The agreement doesn't mean shit now. He shot his kid. His name's going to be all over the fucking place.

ALBERT

She told me a lot of things that would embarrass them if it was tied to them.

STEVE

Like what?

ALBERT

We think David tried to rape his mother and her husband didn't try to stop it.

STEVE

He just stood there and watched?

ALBERT

David had a knife and Rosenthal was terrified. He couldn't live with the shame of doing nothing.

STEVE

We're the only ones who have this and you say we can't use it?

ALBERT

I'll try to get their OK.

STEVE

He's going to end up in jail and this story will help her husband.

ALBERT

How the hell is it going to help him?

STEVE

It'll show why he was driven to shoot his son. Gain sympathy for him. Get on the phone and tell the wife that. We don't have a lot of time. And lay your notes off on Hank.

ALBERT

He's not writing my story.

STEVE

We're talking 150 inches in less than five hours. Hank's our fastest writer.

ALBERT

(Dialing a phone number)

It's my story.

STEVE

When was the last time you wrote a major story on deadline.

(He can't remember)

Lay your notes off on Hank.

(He doesn't move)

Walters.

ALBERT

I'm writing the story.

STEVE

Are you refusing to give Hank your notes?

ALBERT

(On phone)

Hello. May I speak to Mrs. Rosenthal?...Albert Walters. She knows me...I know this is a bad time but I've got to speak to her now...Tell her it's me.

(Hangs up)

STEVE

(Changing his tactics)

OK, you write the story. Give it to me in sections.

Steve goes to Hank.

STEVE (cont'd)

We're doing a reconstruction of the events leading up to the shooting. Al's typing up a first draft now. I want you to get it into shape.

HANK

You mean rewrite it?

STEVE

I mean do whatever has to be done.

Albert dials the phone as Ginny hangs up.

GINNY

I finally got hold of the pathologist who checked out the body.

STEVE

Hank's doing the main bar. Give him what you have.

GINNY

He said the hospital is a mob scene. The New York Times already had a reporter there.

She goes to Hank. Albert slams down the phone. It was busy.

GINNY (cont'd)

(To Hank)

Rosenthal shot his son four times in the legs and once in the stomach, just below the heart. That's what killed him.

Ginny holds her hand as though it's a gun, scans the room for a target. She considers Steve but decides to shoot Hank.

GINNY (cont'd)

Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow! Pow!

HANK

Did he shoot the boy in the legs or the stomach first?

GINNY

I don't know.

HANK

The sequence is important. I'm trying to reconstruct the event. If the boy was advancing on him and he shoots him in the legs first, that should have stopped him. He didn't have to shoot again. If he did shoot again, maybe he wanted to kill him.

GINNY

The pathologist didn't say what the order was.

HANK

There must be some way to tell.

GINNY

(Facetiously)

I'm sure you'll find a way.

Ginny goes to her desk and sees Albert writing furiously.

GINNY (cont'd)

You're working on your story?

ALBERT

Yeah.

GINNY

They gave you permission to identify them?

ALBERT

Not yet. But they will. Steve thinks the story might help the father get sympathy. Help him in court.

GINNY

You agree?

ALBERT

It just might help him. I sure as hell am rooting for him knowing what I know. The defense couldn't ask for better publicity.

GINNY

Then again it might help the prosecution. By establishing premeditation.

ALBERT

My story shows how the poor man was driven to do something like that.

GINNY

Still it's premeditation.

ALBERT

What are you saying, Ginny, I shouldn't write the story?

GINNY

Write the story and let the chips fall where they may. Isn't that what you've always told me? Your only responsibility is to the reader. Not your sources.



ALBERT

My story will help him. Here look what I wrote.

She looks at Albert's screen.

GINNY

The father just stood by and watched? What kind of man would do that?

ALBERT

The man was terrified. Doesn't that come through?

GINNY

He should have stopped him or at least tried.

ALBERT

You read it all wrong. The father is a very sympathetic character in this story.

GINNY

He should have done something.

ALBERT

He was petrified with fear, I tell you.

(Typing furiously)

There. Does that make it clear.

GINNY

(Reading)

All the time it was happening, a knife was within reach of the boy. Twice when the father started to move, the youth stopped what he was doing, grabbed the knife and threatened his mother with it.

ALBERT

What do you think?

GINNY

It makes it clearer.

ALBERT

Aaron had no choice.

GINNY

Yes, I can see that now.

STEVE

Hey, Walters, do you have something I can look at?

ALBERT

In a few minutes, Steve.

GINNY

But I still don't think much of him as a man.

ALBERT

Oh, Jeez.

GINNY

Maybe because I'm a woman. The thought of being raped and the man I love watching and doing nothing.

ALBERT

The story isn't working if you don't understand.

GINNY

It's what happened that's troubling, not the way you write it.

ALBERT

(Typing furiously and then reading)

The boy threw his mother to the ground and started ripping off her clothes. Rosenthal desperately wanted to do something, anything, to stop it. But every time he moved toward them the boy grabbed the knife and threatened to kill her. What about that?

She looks at it without comment.

ALBERT (cont'd)

Still no sympathy for him?

GINNY

Maybe you should leave all of that out of the story.

ALBERT

I can't do that. It's too important.

The focus switches to Hank and Steve.

HANK

(On the phone)

Thanks, Brownie. I owe you one.

(Hanging up)

One of my sources in the police department said he was aiming low when the first shots were fired.

STEVE

Then he raised the gun and shot him in the stomach?

HANK

They think the boy was already laid out on the floor when he shot him in the chest. It wasn't the stomach.

STEVE

This means he wanted to kill him.

HANK

Five shots at point blank range is a lot just to stop someone.

STEVE

(Calling out)

Hey, Walters, are you going to let me see something or not?

ALBERT

I still haven't been able to get hold of the mother. The phone's been busy.

STEVE

Then we've got to go ahead without her OK.

ALBERT

(Dialing the operator)

Yes, operator.. I've been trying to reach two one five, seven two six, seven eight four eight for quite a while and it's always busy. Could you break into the call. It's an emergency....What do you mean there's nothing you can do? I told you. This is an emergency...

(Slamming down the phone)

Shit. I'm going over to her house.

STEVE

You don't have time?

ALBERT

I'll be right back.

STEVE

Where's my story?

ALBERT

You'll get your story.

STEVE

You're hanging me out to dry, Walters. I'm not going to forget this.

9

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

9

## SCENE 9

The Rosenthal home, thirty minutes later.  
Phyllis is standing in the archway to the  
dining room calling to people. Albert is  
sitting on a chair.

PHYLLIS

I don't care if he is a reporter. I want to talk to him. Make some coffee for everyone. I won't be long.

She goes to Albert.

PHYLLIS (cont'd)

Suddenly now everyone wants to protect me. Where were they when I needed them? After their pot of coffee, I'm sending them home.

VOICE (O.S.)

The police won't let us in the kitchen. It's a crime scene.

PHYLLIS

Then do something else.

ALBERT

You shouldn't be staying here tonight. You should be with someone.

PHYLLIS

Why? I don't have to worry about David anymore.

ALBERT

Too many sad things happened here, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

No one's driving me from my home. Not you, not them, not...(thinking David)...not anyone.

ALBERT

I can't stay long. The final edition goes to press in a few hours.

PHYLLIS

Oh. I see.

He pointedly takes out his notebook and pen.

ALBERT

Did David force his way into the house? Did he push in a door, break a window, do something to...

PHYLLIS

He knocked on the door and Aaron let him in.

ALBERT

He let him in?

PHYLLIS

Yes.

ALBERT

There must have been a struggle. A fight.

PHYLLIS

No. Nothing like that.

ALBERT

But Aaron was frightened. He was scared of what David would do.

PHYLLIS

He didn't look frightened.

ALBERT

He wasn't frightened after what happened at the birthday party?

PHYLLIS

Albert. I don't think Aaron was frightened.

ALBERT

Fear makes people do awful things.

PHYLLIS

He wasn't frightened.

ALBERT

Tell me how David was acting when he got here.

PHYLLIS

He came in and sat down at the kitchen table with Aaron.

ALBERT

That doesn't sound very menacing.

PHYLLIS

I'm sorry, Albert. That's what he did. And then David started swearing at me. Aaron smiled.

ALBERT

(Shock)

Aaron smiled?

PHYLLIS

Like he was letting David hang himself with the dirty words.

ALBERT

Maybe David had a gun. A knife.

PHYLLIS

He didn't have a gun or knife.

ALBERT

How could you know, for Christ sake?

PHYLLIS

Why are you swearing like this?

ALBERT

I'm sorry. Aaron might have thought he had a weapon under his coat.

PHYLLIS

He wasn't wearing a coat. Just a T-shirt and pajama pants from the hospital.

ALBERT

So what did Aaron do after David sat down with him?

PHYLLIS

He reached under the table for his gun.

(Albert is taking notes)

Suddenly you're writing everything down.

ALBERT

Then what?

PHYLLIS

He shot him.

ALBERT

Just like that?

PHYLLIS

Yes.

ALBERT

Somehow David must have threatened Aaron.

PHYLLIS

No, it wasn't like that. David laughed. And Aaron shot him. And then Aaron shot him again.

ALBERT

Did he shoot David after he fell to the ground?

PHYLLIS

Yes. David couldn't get up. Aaron shot him again and again and again.

ALBERT

Oh, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

The police took Aaron to police headquarters. For questioning, they said. Do you think they're going to arrest Aaron?

ALBERT

Yes.



PHYLLIS

What will happen to him in jail? He's not a strong man.

ALBERT

It's awful what's happening.

PHYLLIS

Isn't that something? My son is dead and all I'm thinking about is Aaron.

ALBERT

For David the pain is over.

PHYLLIS

I mourn my son's death with relief.

ALBERT

You're safe now.

PHYLLIS

I think Aaron knew when he bought the gun. He knew that one day he'd have to shoot him.

ALBERT

No, you don't know that, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

Why do you say I can't know that?

ALBERT

No one can know what's in another person's mind.

PHYLLIS

I never wanted that gun in this house. The gun is necessary, he said. This is the word he used. Necessary. The gun is necessary. He said it just like that.

ALBERT

With no emotion?

PHYLLIS

It was almost as if David was already dead.

ALBERT

Maybe you misunderstood him.

PHYLLIS

Why do you keep trying to put words in my mouth?

ALBERT

Phyllis, this doesn't look good for Aaron. David wasn't armed. He wasn't threatening Aaron. He just sat down with his father in the kitchen. And then Aaron shot him when he laughed. With a gun he'd bought just to do that. I don't want to frighten you, Phyllis, but Aaron could be tried for premeditated murder.

PHYLLIS

He was driven to do what he did.

ALBERT

No one knows that. All they know is that Aaron Rosenthal murdered his son for no apparent reason. Phyllis, please, let me show them what a good man Aaron is. Let me show them why a man like Aaron would do such a thing. Let me write the story I've been reporting all these months.

PHYLLIS

You want to write that story now? Everyone will know you're writing about us.

ALBERT

The story might help Aaron.

PHYLLIS

You promised me no one would know who you were writing about.

ALBERT

It's no longer a private matter. The shooting is already on the internet. Tonight your names will be on all the television stations, tomorrow in all the newspapers.

PHYLLIS

You gave me your word.

ALBERT

People will understand why you were so scared of David.

PHYLLIS

You're not going to write about the birthday party.

ALBERT

That more than anything shows why Aaron was driven to do what he did.

PHYLLIS

Writing about that will help Aaron?

ALBERT

The public must know how the system failed you.

PHYLLIS

(Pressing)

Do you think the story will help Aaron?

Albert doesn't respond.

PHYLLIS (cont'd)

Tell me. Albert

ALBERT

It's possible.

PHYLLIS

But you're not sure that it will?

ALBERT

How can anyone know for certain?

PHYLLIS

Then it's also possible the story could hurt him.

ALBERT

These are questions for your lawyer.

PHYLLIS

Aaron's lawyer is with him at the police station. Do I have time to ask him?

ALBERT

We have only a few hours.

PHYLLIS

So then you're the only one who can tell me.

ALBERT

I'm not your lawyer.

PHYLLIS

Should I let you use our names?

ALBERT

I'm a reporter. I'm here gathering information for a story you've already agreed to. Do I have to remind you of that every time I come here? You know what I am. You can't ask me such questions.

PHYLLIS

I thought you were my friend.

ALBERT

I'm only a reporter.

PHYLLIS

I know you're a reporter. I know you're here to write your story. But I also know you're a good man.

ALBERT

Do I have your permission to use your names?

PHYLLIS

If I say no?

ALBERT

It's important to do this story.

PHYLLIS

But if I don't give you permission?

He doesn't respond.

PHYLLIS (cont'd)

Would you write the story?

ALBERT

Would I write the story? I'd have no choice. I couldn't write it. I gave you my word.

PHYLLIS

I don't know what to do.

ALBERT

Do I have your permission?

I leave it in your hands, Albert. You're a good man. I know you'll do what you think is right.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

Online Sample Reading Only

10

10

## SCENE 10

The news room is a bedlam of activity. Steve is on the phone, surrounded by photographs and artists' renditions of the shooting scene. Bruce is waiting to speak to him. Ginny is taking notes on the phone. Hank is writing furiously.

STEVE

(On the phone)

Damnit, Jim. This sketch of the murder scene is all wrong. The body was lying on its left side, facing the mother, not the other way around. Do it over again.

(Slams down the phone)

BRUCE

What angle do you want on the neighbors story? Everyone thinks he's a nice guy. A little stand-offish and proud, but a nice guy. No one knew the boy was that sick.

STEVE

That's your angle. A proud man living with a shameful secret.

Steve's phone rings.

STEVE (cont'd)

News desk...Let me get Hank. Hey, Hank, Murphy is on one. It's definite. Gallo is charging Rosenthal with first-degree murder.

(Hangs up)

GINNY

(Calling out to Steve)

They're not doing the autopsy until tomorrow. So they don't have all the details we need. But I got a lot of educated guesses from the pathologist I know. He thinks the bullet smashed a major artery and the boy bled to death.

STEVE

So the kid was lying there on the ground, bleeding to death while his parents watched?

GINNY

That's what it sounds like.

STEVE

Hell of a good scene. Give me an inch-by-inch reenactment of the kid bleeding to death while his parents watched. Describe the damage each slug did. How many bullets did Rosenthal's gun have?

GINNY

Six.

STEVE

Why didn't he fire the sixth shot? Do they think he was saving it for suicide?

GINNY

It's a possibility.

STEVE

Hey, Hank.

HANK

Yeah. Steve.

STEVE

See if Murphy can get someone to speculate on why Rosenthal didn't fire all six bullets.

Hank calls Murphy. The news desk phone rings.

STEVE (cont'd)

Yeah...I don't care what the photographer said. The story is saying that the body was facing the mother. That's how I want the sketch to look.

(Hangs up)

Hank, tell Murphy to double check that the body was facing the mother.

Albert enters and goes to his desk. All eyes are on him as he sits down silently at his desk.

STEVE (cont'd)

She gave you permission to use the names.

Albert doesn't reply.

STEVE (cont'd)

She did, didn't she?

ALBERT

She said to do what I think is best.

STEVE

Great. Send the story to my queue.

ALBERT

I can't.

STEVE

What are you talking about?

ALBERT

I don't think the story would be in their best interest.

STEVE

Fuck their best interests. She released you from your agreement. It's not binding anymore.

The story could jeopardize Aaron's legal defense.

STEVE

That's his problem, not ours.

ALBERT

We don't need the events leading up to tonight. She gave me a blow-by-blow description of what happened tonight. No one else has it. We can recreate the entire...



STEVE

I want the attempted rape.

ALBERT

I'll open the story with these two little people cowering in their house, waiting for a son they're terrified of.

STEVE

That doesn't answer the question everyone is asking. Why would a Nobel Laureate murder his son?

ALBERT

He didn't murder him.

STEVE

The kid's dead, isn't he?

ALBERT

Yes.

STEVE

It wasn't an accident.

ALBERT

No.

STEVE

Sounds like murder to me. Why'd he do it?

ALBERT

We'll have to leave the question unanswered.

Steve studies Albert for several seconds and finally smiles.

STEVE

You don't really have a story, do you?

ALBERT

We can do my story later, when this blows over, and no one connects it with the Rosenthals. It's a dramatic illustration of how the mental health system...

STEVE

Two full pages have been set aside and you don't even have a story.

ALBERT

I won't exploit them. They let me into their lives.

STEVE

You don't have what it takes anymore.

ALBERT

Because they trusted me.

STEVE

You can't report. You can't write. So you pretend you have a story.

ALBERT

You don't think I have the story?

STEVE

You're a loser, Walters. A has-been.

ALBERT

I've been writing it for the past six months.

(Calling up the story on his computer)

There.

Steve and the other reporters, who have been eavesdropping, eagerly gather around Albert to read the story on his screen. Steve is enthralled.

STEVE

(Referring to the story after reading the beginning)

You were actually there, when all this was happening?

ALBERT

Some times you've got to leave the office to do reporting.

STEVE

Scroll down.

Albert advances the story on his screen.

HANK

This is real good stuff, Al.

BRUCE

We should get this on line right away.

STEVE

Scroll down some more.

Albert advances the story.

STEVE (cont'd)

Why didn't you tell me about this?

ALBERT

You weren't interested.

STEVE

Well, I'm interested now.

GINNY

This is beautiful, Al.

HANK

He just stood there like that?

BRUCE

The Times has already gotten the shooting on their website.

STEVE

We're using this story with or without your cooperation. With or without your byline. Push the goddamn send button.

ALBERT

I'm not backing down on my word.

STEVE

I want that story off your private queue. Push the fucking send button.

HANK

Steve's right, Al. You're not obligated anymore.

GINNY

She told you to do what you thought was right. It's right that we publish the story. The public has a right to know.

ALBERT

What's right for them. Not us.

GINNY

You're only obligation is to the reader.

ALBERT

I promised them that it was a story about the mental health system and not them. They wouldn't be hurt or embarrassed because no one would know they were the family I was writing about.

STEVE

Push the fucking send button.

ALBERT

You want me to push a fucking button?

He goes to delete the story. Hank grabs his hand and stops him.

HANK

No, Al. You can't delete it.

BRUCE

He murdered his son. He's not entitled to privacy. We're legally in the right.

GINNY

You can't destroy all this work you've done.

STEVE

Get away from that computer.

GINNY

This'll show everyone what a real newspaperman can do.

STEVE

You're not deleting that story.

GINNY

The family got screwed by the system. The public has to be told. Nothing gets fixed if nobody knows it's broken. That's what you've always been saying.

ALBERT

We're playing with their lives.

GINNY

The ultimate good. Remember the ultimate good.

ALBERT

The Rosenthals are hurting.

BRUCE

Al, the New York Times is here. All the networks and news blogs. This is our chance to beat them all.

Steve grabs Albert around the neck to pull him from his computer, but Albert breaks free and moves to delete the story.

EVERYONE

No.

He deletes the story

STEVE

You son of a bitch.

(Grabbing his phone and pushing a button)

This is Belton. We just pushed the wrong key and lost a story. Can you get it back for us?

(Reading the number on Albert's terminal)

It's on System 11. Screen 14.

(Pause)

What do you mean you can't save it. He deleted it only a few seconds ago....Don't you have any backup? I see.

(Putting the phone down quietly)

I want you out of here. You're finished.

HANK

You shouldn't have done that.

BRUCE

Maybe we can reconstruct enough of it for an alert.

GINNY

Goddamnit, Al. You were that close to doing it. That close.

Steve's phone rings.

STEVE

News Desk...Yes, Hannibal...We've run into a few problems, but I'm taking care of them...Gallo's definitely going with a first-degree murder charge...I've got a few details to take care of before deadline, Hannibal. Can I get back to you?...Yeah, sure. Thanks for the compliment.

(Hangs up)

Hank.

HANK

Yes, Steve.

STEVE

Get hold of Rosenthal's wife. Convince her that this story will save her husband and get all the details on the rape. Murphy has the phone number.

HANK

Right, Steve.

Hank dials the phone and talks to Murphy.

GINNY

(To Albert)

You didn't have to do that.

ALBERT

She's an innocent. They all are. There are so many things to consider if you gain their trust.

GINNY

We have no business thinking about that stuff.

She turns abruptly and goes to the window.

STEVE

I want you out of here now.

ALBERT

Don't you understand, I had to honor...

STEVE

I'm tired of your bullshit. Just get the hell out of here.

Steve grabs the phone and turns away from Albert. Albert goes to his desk and starts clearing out the drawers.

STEVE (cont'd)

(On phone)

OK, Jim, are we set on the sketch? Good. You can make it four columns wide after all. It looks like we'll be having more space than we thought.

(Hangs up. Sees Ginny standing at the window. Goes to her)

Your friend shouldn't have done that, you know?

She nods.

STEVE (cont'd)

You can't think like that and do this job.

GINNY

It doesn't matter who you hurt.

STEVE

You do what you have to to get the story.

GINNY

Yeah.

STEVE

See what you can get on the Nobel Rosenthal won.

GINNY

Sure, Steve.

She goes to her desk and puts on phone earphones.

BRUCE

Tonight was my early night, but I could hang around until the final if that would help.

STEVE

I appreciate that, Bruce. See if you can get comments from some of Rosenthal's colleagues in the university.

BRUCE

Will do.

Bruce goes to his desk and dials a number. Now everyone is on their phones as Albert finishes clearing his desk. He takes out a typed play manuscript, looks at it with interest and puts it into his briefcase. He wants to say goodbye to everyone but they're all rushing to meet the final edition deadline. Standing, he fondly scans the news room he loves one last time and exits.

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY



11

11

SCENE

Online Sample Reading Only