

TABLOID VALLEY

by
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Pilot Episode: "Fake News"

INT. WINN & DIXIE - MORNING

Lantana, FL. 1973. A gleaming supermarket.

A long line of mostly women with carts piled high with cartoon cereals and TV dinners peruse the garish tabloids with sensational headlines (Castro Abducted By UFO! Deadly Wife Sex-Swap Pact!) in the adjacent racks.

Also in line stands an imposing and aloof man in white short-sleeves and smudged glasses (FRANCES "FRANK" ZINO, late 50's) with a cart. He watches a HOUSEWIFE leafing through the tabs.

FRANK

My wife loves those too.

HOUSEWIFE

Oh I never read this trash.

(off tabloid she's holding)

Ok. Once in a while.

FRANK

She says the same thing. She's home with the flu and asked me to pick one up but I can't remember which one she wanted?

HOUSEWIFE

Well I've been reading *The National Examiner* for years. Just last issue alone I got a recipe for pineapple chicken, the scoop on Johnny Carson's honeymoon and a cure for my canker sores.

FRANK

The Examiner it is. Thank--

HOUSEWIFE

But lately *The Tattler* has better photos and *The Sun* is racier and *The Globe* is cheaper with some of the same scoops as *The Examiner*.

(shrugs)

If you really want to be a good husband, maybe you should buy them all.

The Housewife smiles good-naturedly. Mood soured, Frank gives a disdainful smile back. A new lane opens up.

CASHIER

I'll take you over here, sir!

Frank grabs a pack of cigarettes and strides right out of the store, abandoning his whole shopping cart. The BAG BOY shrugs at the Cashier.

BAG BOY

Every week like clockwork.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE, THE NATIONAL EXAMINER - MORNING

PATTY SHEPARD (hard-working, idealistic, optimistic) is sitting upright, dressed for success in bargain basement JC Penny and trying not to seem desperate. The bullpen bustles in the window behind her.

Nervous, Patty talks fast and lays it on thick.

PATTY

There's just so many exciting innovations happening in "new journalism." And with everything going on in the country now, the free press has never been so vital to our democracy.

Reveal JOE RAILS (cool, feathered hair, tailored dress shirt, jaded as they come - he's had to be to get where he is at 35) at his desk across from her. Smoking, Joe glances up from her resume.

JOE

It's a good resume. I--

PATTY

(hushed)

Is Mr. Zino gonna be part of the interview process?

JOE

No. Unless he is. You never know with Mr. Zino.

(sarcastic)

Makes every day a special gift.

PATTY

I heard he pulled a gun on an intern for making eye contact? And he eats the same peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch every--

JOE

He's also got the strength of three grizzly bears and can only be killed by a holy water.

PATTY

I'm sorry. That was off-track. Where was I?

JOE

The free press has never been so vital to our yada yada.

PATTY

(quietly)
--democracy.

Joe glances down at her resume.

JOE

Journalism scholarship to U of F. Freelance clips from The Jupiter Trib, Palm Beach Post, Miami Herald. Great *posture*.

(looks up)

So. You've freelanced all over South Florida but no boy's club newsroom will staff you so you thought why not slum it at a tabloid?

There's a wince of recognition from Patty. But she doesn't take the bait and stays peppy.

PATTY

At the tabloid. I believe tabloids are pushing the envelope to become the future of journalism. Your piece on what's in Kissinger's garbage was a game-changer.

JOE

I envy your idealism...

Patty breathes a sigh of relief, thrilled.

JOE (CONT'D)

... But it's not a good fit here.
(stands)
Nice meeting you, Pammy.

PATTY

Patty.

But Joe's not paying attention and the interview's over. Devastated, Patty stands to go when--

ASSISTANT (O.S.)
BUT I WAS JUST BEING FRIENDLY!?

There's SOBBING from the bullpen. A lifer receptionist (BARB) appears in the doorway.

BARB THE RECEPTIONIST
Joe? Mr. Zino just fired Nina. She complimented his haircut.

JOE
Why the hell would she do a thing like that? How many times do I have to tell everyone.

Patty isn't sure if she should stay or go or what. Joe takes out a thick money clip and peels off bills to Barb.

JOE (CONT'D)
Take her to lunch at The Clam Shack.

Barb nods solemnly - she knows what that means. There's more off screen sobbing. Joe peels off more bills.

JOE (CONT'D)
And shopping. Tell her she'll be paid through the end of the week and she's been a delight to work with.

Joe waves Barb off amid MORE OFF-SCREEN SOBBING. He turns back and is surprised to see Patty standing there.

JOE (CONT'D)
Oh right. You're still here?

Patty takes a breath and steps forward.

PATTY
I hear there's a new opening.

JOE
Trust me. You don't want this job.

PATTY
I can even start right now.

Joe looks at her, skeptical. Patty gives her most hopeful smile.

INT. BULLPEN, AMERICAN EXAMINER - LATER

Scribbling in her notebook, Patty follows ROXY QUARTERS (hippie hair, no bra, street-smart, cool as fuck) on a brisk tour. They pass a closed office with shut blinds.

ROXY

And that's Mr. Zino's office. Don't make eye contact, don't wear strong perfume--

PATTY

Is it true what they say about him and the mafia?

ROXY

--and don't ask questions about him and the "M" word.

(hushed, pointed look)

Although we catch and kill every Frank Sinatra story so you do the math.

They come to a sea of desks filled with mostly MALE REPORTERS smoking, typing and barking into phones.

ROXY (CONT'D)

And this is the bullpen. They call it the zoo but I think that's an insult to animals.

As they walk thru, Patty passes A STRIPPER snapping her gum as she's interviewed, an ELVIS IMPERSONATOR lowering his sunglasses to wink at her, reporters crowding over a giant tape recorder playing SEX SOUNDS.

TAPE

Fuck me, Peter! Fuck me, Peter!

ROXY

Uck. I can never watch *Columbo* again.

Overwhelmed, Patty bumps into the side of a desk.

ROXY (CONT'D)

Here's Nina's desk. Your desk.

Roxy motions to a lonely desk in the corner under a leaky air-conditioner and covered in paperwork.

ROXY (CONT'D)

Got a boyfriend?

PATTY

Yes. Sort of. Mostly. He's been busy with work lately so-

ROXY

Just say yes and put a photo of you lovebirds on your desk. Keeps the jackals at bay.

The rotary phone rings off the hook.

ROXY (CONT'D)

Your job is to field the calls and mail that come in with tips.

PATTY

Great. I love working on reader-generated stories--

ROXY

Yeah. These leads aren't for you.

Patty tries not to look disappointed.

As she speaks, Roxy motions to 'FAST' LANE a Hollywood-looking reporter (cheesy tan, sunglasses) who gives them finger guns. A meek woman covered in cat hair (MARTHA). A man with a comb-over (DR. BOB) popping some pills. An afro'd-reporter (DOOBIE) in a *Lost in Space* T-shirt.

ROXY (CONT'D)

Teen trends come to me. Celebrity tips go to Fast Lane. Human interest to Martha. Health leads to Dr. Bob - *not a real doctor*. Alien and supernatural stuff to Doobie. Oh, and death threats to legal.

HARLEY

Saving the best for last, aren't you sweet thing.

A barrel-chested unshaven reporter (HARLEY DOBBS, 30's) with scarred knuckles and cowboy boots resting on the biggest desk in the bullpen smiles as he palms a football. Think a D-list Hunter S. Thompson.

Roxy rolls her eyes.

ROXY

Harley's our "star" stunt reporter.
Riding with Hell's Angels, swimming with
sharks. If the story sounds dangerous,
give it him. *And pray for the worst.*

An assistant handtrucks over a body-sized mailbag.

PATTY

My god. That's all the mail?

ROXY

No. There's another 200 bags in the
mailroom. Post office just gave us our
own zip code. And as you can tell the tip
line phone never stops. There's a lot of
junk so it's about finding that needle in
the haystack. Just summarize everything
and hand it off to a reporter.

(tour's over, smiles)

Good luck!

Patty takes a seat. She ducks a football sailing overhead
and clears her predecessor's items into a drawer. She
simultaneously answers her first call and digs in the
mail bag.

PATTY

(very cheery)

Hello! National Examiner Tip line?

'NICE' CALLER (O.S.)

Yes, hello. I'm calling from Canton,
Illinois. My coworkers and I spotted an
UFO on our lunch break.

PATTY

Really? Wow. Please tell me more.

'NICE' CALLER (O.S.)

It's cloudy so it was hard to see. What's
the weather like there? What are you
wearing?

PATTY

Here? Oh it's warm. And nothing special.
Just a pantsuit I got on sale at--

There's a SLAPPING SOUND on the line. Patty stares at the
receiver, freaked-out.

PATTY (CONT'D)

Um... Uh... Excuse me, sir. Are you--

'NICE' CALLER (O.S.)

OOOHHHH GOOD GOD YES--

Patty slams the receiver down - she's shaking. The phone RINGS again startling her.

PATTY

(verge of tears)

National Examiner Tip line?

SMASHCUT TO A TITLE CARD with the following...

TABLOID VALLEY

Nickname given to the stretch of South Florida where half a dozen tabloids set up shop in the early 1970's to take advantage of cheap costs, avoid unionization, poach each other's employees and well, cause Florida's weird like that.

INT. PATTY'S DESK, BULLPEN - (MONTAGE)

MUSIC CUE: Think The Clash's *Career Opportunities*.

Shouldering the phone, Patty works (outfits changing as days pass) thru the mail (crayon-written manifestos, obscene photos, doodles on prison stationery) with a framed photo of her and her boyfriend ROBERT (cute, clean-cut, a little nerdy) nearby. Patty can't help look over at the CONFERENCE ROOM where Joe conducts the meetings for the reporters. *That's where the action is.*

Ow! Patty gets a paper cut and wraps her finger with Scotch tape.

INTERCUT: Patty hand-trucks mail from the MAIL ROOM where the bags are piled high / Patty passes out tips to Reporters / Patty eats alone at her desk as Reporters socialize / Patty returns to the mail room where we see she's made a real dent in the number of bags.

Again, Patty at her desk.

She looks towards Frank Zino's office and sees someone watching her through the closed blinds.

She starts and paper-cuts herself - by now six of her fingers have Scotch tape over the tips.

END MONTAGE

INT. FRANK ZINO'S OFFICE, NATIONAL EXAMINER - WEEK LATER

ANGLE ON: Patty working at her desk.

Frank peers at her thru the blinds as Joe stands at attention behind him. The office is no-frills with the tab's best-selling covers ("Man Eats Dog!", "Dean Martin is a Zombie!", "Modern Women Aren't Human!") on the wall.

FRANK

I don't like the new girl. She's too---
(then)
You sure she's not a spy?

Frank lets the blinds snap shut and turns around.

JOE

She doesn't have the character.

FRANK

Well someone's leaking.

Frank flings a copy of *The Globe* at Joe. Joe catches it.

FRANK (CONT'D)

This is the third time in as many months *The Globe's* published a story we were working on. They're gaining in circulation and Rupert Macon's laughing his ass off somewhere.

JOE

Competing Liz Taylor stories is hardly us getting scooped.

FRANK

I put a piece of cheesecake in a bikini on page three, them too. I move operations to Florida, them too. I move into the supermarkets, them too.

Frank lights a smoke, worked up.

INT. PATTY'S DESK, BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

At her desk, Patty shoulders the phone with the expression of someone who's heard too many crank calls.

"ANGRY GUY" CALLER (O.S.)
I'm telling you video games are turning
this country queer. It's all those hours
using a joystick--

Spotting Joe leaving Zino's office, Patty straightens up.

PATTY
Fascinating. Mind holding.

Patty runs across the bullpen to fall in step with Joe.

PATTY (CONT'D)
Oh! Joe. Hi. I was thinking. I've made
amazing progress with the mail--

JOE
Otherwise known as doing your job.

As Patty and Joe walk, a REMOTE CONTROL TOY CAR follows at Patty's heels. Harley controls it while a few reporters watch and snicker. The car keeps tripping Patty up.

PATTY
--and was wondering if I could sit in on
an editorial meeting?

JOE
Morning meetings are for editors and
reporters.

PATTY
Knowing the editorial side will help me
better narrow down tip searches.

JOE
What's to narrow? Unless it's written in
feces, just hand the tip to a reporter.

PATTY
I just feel like maybe my attributes
could be utilized for more than answering
pervert calls and schizophrenic's mail--

JOE

Watch it. That's our core readership
you're denigrating.

PATTY

Sorry. It's just that--

The Toy Car bangs into her shins. Stumbling, Patty stops to rub her foot. Oblivious to the toy and reporters laughing, Joe keeps walking.

JOE

You weren't hired to have your attributes
utilized, you were hired to do a job. And
every second you're talking to me, you're
not doing it.

Joe walks in one direction and the toy car speeds off in another. Embarrassed, Patty straightens up as Roxy roller-skates by her.

ROXY

How's your first week going?

PATTY

All downhill from being masturbated to.

Roxy skates to a stop with a look of pity.

ROXY

And that's why God invented scorpion
bowls.

OFF Patty's clueless face.

INT. HAWAIIAN BAR & MOTEL - NIGHT

ANGLE ON: A giant flaming alcoholic drink in a kitschy
Buddha punch bowl.

The Hawaiiin-shirt wearing bartender carries the bowl over to where Patty and Roxy sit at the bar (Tiki meets honky-tonk dive) and drink with straws.

PATTY

How long did it take you to move up from
the tips desk?

Patty sips and blanches at how strong the drink is.

ROXY

Oh I was never a tips girl. I started as a groupie. I hate that word. I was on the road since I was 13. Zappa, Rundgren, Bowie.

PATTY

Wow.

ROXY

It was pretty cool until it wasn't. Joe found me and offered me a large check to let him write my story. I told him to keep the check and hire me to write my own story.

Patty's impressed. She spots Joe entering the bar (always the cool customer). He's quickly doted on by a cute waitress as he commandeers his favorite "Dirty Harry" pinball machine.

PATTY

Is everyone here from *The Examiner*?

ROXY

No. There's people from *The Tattler*, *The Globe*, *The Star*, *The Sun*.

(off Patty's look)

Not a ton of places to drink in Tabloid Valley.

The Bartender comes over.

BARTENDER

Fella over there wants to buy a drink for the new girl.

Patty looks to the end of the bar - a handsome young man with floppy hair (SCOOTER) smiles at her.

PATTY

Really? So sweet. Well I guess sure--

ROXY

Tell him no thanks, Jerry. Actually skip the 'thanks' and just tell him no.

The Bartender shrugs and heads off to deliver the news.

ROXY (CONT'D)

You're too green to be having drinks with the competition. He's a *Globe* reporter and a notorious story poacher.

Harley passes by with the crew of Examiner reporters (Fast Lane, Dr. Bob, Doobie) in his wake.

HARLEY

Looking good, girls.

(to other reporters)

Lord, I wanna be reincarnated as a barstool.

ROXY

(gives him the finger)

Norman Mailer called. He wants his prose back, you hack.

Harley mimes a dagger through his heart as the reporters all laugh. They head off to play pool.

PATTY

God, that peanut gallery can be such jerks.

ROXY

Harley's just bitter cause the one time I was drunk enough to fuck him at the Christmas party...

(hushed voice)

he'd done too much blow and had limp dick.

Patty and Roxy snicker.

ROXY (CONT'D)

This place is like prison. You're the fresh meat and they'll keep pushing your buttons till you fight back and show them you're not afraid.

PATTY

Ok, right. I wish I had my notebook. Fight back, no fear, *sleep with David Bowie*.

The ladies crack up. There's a commotion (shouting, a smashed bottle) as Harley and a competing Reporter get in fight. The Reporter swings a pool stick at Harley instead hitting Dr. Bob in the face. It's CHAOS.

JOE

Whoa. Break it up, assholes.

Joe runs over to get in the middle and break up the brawl. Roxy shrugs at Patty like it's no big deal.

ROXY

It's not exactly *Reader's Digest* around here.

INT. BULLPEN, NATIONAL EXAMINER - MORNING

With a renewed purpose, Patty enters the bullpen nodding and saying good morning to everyone. The Remote Control Car zooms out from a desk and nips at her heels as the teasing starts.

DOOBIE

I want some quality leads today, new girl.

FAST LANE

Seriously, baby. Ed McMahon falling off the wagon again ain't cutting it.

DR. BOB

Three good tips by lunch and I got a quaalude with your name on it, kid.

HARLEY

Meet me in the dark room later, Pattycakes. I'll show you a hot tip. Ha, ha.

PATTY

Suck an egg, Harley.

Patty kicks his Remote Control Car across the floor - it breaks against the wall.

PATTY (CONT'D)

You couldn't even get it up at the Christmas party.

Harley's expression turn grim and the rest of the reporters gasp or look embarrassed for him. Martha laughs and covers her mouth. Roxy sinks her face in her palm.

Oblivious to how she's overshot her mark, Patty smirks and takes her seat and gets to work.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE, NATIONAL EXAMINER - AFTERNOON

Joe looks out of his window onto the bullpen - he's studying the reporters as they horse around (Harley, Fast Lane, Dr. Bob, Doobie, Martha) with a serious expression. He buzzes his intercom.

JOE

Barb, ask Fast Lane to come in here.

INT. PATTY'S DESK, BULLPEN - EARLY EVENING

Everyone's clearing out for the day. Patty's still working the slush pile and phone lines. A frantic man speaking in broken English is on the line.

"GREEK MAN" CALLER

Hello. *Yasas*. Yes I have tip. Are you reporter?

PATTY

Not technically. Tell me your tip and a reporter will follow-up in the morning if-

"GREEK MAN" CALLER

I have no time! I don't have a lot of access to phones. I'm Alekos David. I'm a first mate aboard *The Christina O*.

PATTY

Just tell me your tip and-- *The Christina O*? Oh!

Patty straightens up, pen poised on her notebook.

PATTY (CONT'D)

You mean *Aristotle Onasis's yacht?*

INT. THE SPAGHETTI BARN - NIGHT

A candlelight Italian restaurant all leather booths and murals of Venice canals. The closest thing to classy in this jerkwater.

With a rumpled blazer on, Frank and Rosebud walk through the restaurant. It's dead except--

RUPERT MACON (O.S.)
 (Australian accent)
 ... I said if you ever publish another
 bad word about me you're fired. He said
 you can't do that! I said of course I
 can, I just bought your newspaper, you
 dumb prick!

Roars of LAUGHTER. Frank stiffens as a man his age except
 handsome, social, tan and dapper (RUPERT MACON) leans out
 from his booth. He's with his 20-something trophy wife
 (MIMI) and another well-heeled couple.

RUPERT MACON (CONT'D)
 Frank Zino - man of mystery! I was
 wondering when I'd bump into you. Looking
 sharp.

FRANK
 Rupert.

RUPERT MACON
 You really started a trend moving down
 here. And Mimi and I just love Florida,
 even this hick town. Been here so much
 this month, I've been ignoring my papers
 in the UK and LA. Ha, ha. Let's play
 golf.

ROSEBUD
 Him golf? Mr. Personality hasn't taken
 day off since our honeymoon.

RUPERT MACON
 Ha ha! No rest for the wicked, eh Frank.
 I just bought a place in Palm Beach.
 You'll both have to come up!

FRANK
 We're gonna go eat.

Frank pulls Rosebud a few booths away as Rupert laughs
 and prattles on behind them. They sit.

ROSEBUD
 Charming man. We should've bought in Palm
 Beach.

WAITER

Mr and Mrs. Zino. Always a pleasure.
Tonight's--

A WAITER approaches with menus. Frank refuses them.

FRANK

Usual for me. Halibut for her.

WAITER

Of course, Mr. Zino. I--
(remembers)
Unfortunately we just ran out of halibut.
Apologies. The cod is actually far--

ROSEBUD

Cod's great.

Frank looks around - there's only Rupert and his fun-loving party there.

FRANK

What do you mean you're out? Did he order it? Tell him you're out.

WAITER

Um? I don't think I-- I mean he just ordered-- I can't just--

A SERVER emerges from the kitchen with a tray. The nervous Waiter motions like 'see.' Frank stands, pushes him aside and intercepts the Server.

FRANK

Hey! Hey. *Senor?* Over here. Gimme that.

SERVER

Que? No, no, no. *Caliente!*

Frank grabs the hot plate of fish off the tray and...

FRANK

Ow. Christ.

... and hurries it over to his table. He drops it with a bang in front of Rosebud and sucks his burnt palm. He looks up at the scared Waiter.

FRANK (CONT'D)

And I'll have my usual.

The Waiter hurries off. Frank leans out of the booth and sees Rupert checking his watch and looking towards the kitchen for his food.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Ha, ha. Cunt.

Frank looks back at his wife sitting there with the halibut that's been hastily dropped in front of her.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Go ahead. Eat. Happy anniversary.

Staring daggers, Rosebud forks the fish into her mouth.

ROSEBUD

(mouthful)

You're not well, Frank.

INT. PATTY'S DESK, BULLPEN - MORNING

Like she has a hot scoop, Patty types rapidly at her desk. She spots Barb heading towards the Conference Room with a pot of coffee for refills.

PATTY

Hey Barb?

Jumping up, Patty races over to intercept her.

PATTY (CONT'D)

You're too busy. Let me take that.

BARB

What? This is my job.

PATTY

Just let me help you out. C'mon.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, NATIONAL EXAMINER - CONTINUOUS

Joe paces in front of a dozen staffers (Thru the window, Patty wrestles the coffee pot away from Barb).

JOE

This week I wanna lead with the sex cult in Ohio. In the banner we'll tease Peter Falk's affair and Evil Knieval's DUI mugshot.

Patty slides into the conference room and start refilling everyone's coffee. Joe eyes her, annoyed.

JOE (CONT'D)

Ok, floor me. What's everyone got?

Going around the table, Joe points at the various reporters to pitch. It's all rapid fire.

DR. BOB

I'm doing a follow-up on reader donations to our cancer orphan Little Bobby in Des Moines. His hair's finally fallen out so we'll wanna lead with a new photo.

JOE

You're all heart, Bob.

FAST LANE

Guess which of one of your favorite *Laugh-In* stars have herpes? Trick question - all of them, baby! The make-up woman tells all.

JOE

Gross but good. Sock it to me, Martha.

MARTHA

I'm flying to Winnipeg this afternoon to cover the frozen lake with Jesus's face.

JOE

You get all the sexy assignments. Roxy?

ROXY

Since *The Exorcist*, kids all over the Midwest are getting possessed. Hot teen trend or the devil working overtime?

JOE

Let the readers decide. We'll run a poll.

DOOBIE

A Kansas family sent in photos of the livestock they claim were raped and mutilated by aliens.

JOE

Easier to believe in aliens than that your kids are psychopaths I guess. Harley?

HARLEY

Headed to Havana this weekend to box El Jefe, their local heavyweight gorilla.

JOE

A regular Hemingway. Hold it, didn't you do that story last year?

HARLEY

That was a kangaroo in Perth. Broke three ribs for that story, glad it made an impression.

JOE

Alright. Solid work, people. I--

PATTY

And, uh, I have something to add?

Everyone looks to Patty, nervously standing there with the coffee pot. Joe looks ticked.

JOE

You got 10 seconds and I'm already counting.

PATTY

(fast and frantic)

The Christina O carrying none other than Jackie O and Aristotle Onassis is heading up the coast of France and one of the crew is so homesick that he's ready to tell all about his bosses--

JOE

(skeptical)

No offense Patty but this sounds--

PATTY

Too good to be true? I spent all night verifying the ship's navigational points and am almost done typing up a draft with a lead about how Jackie and Aristotle haven't talked for weeks and won't even--

HARLEY

(same "Greek" voice as over the phone)

--sunbath on the same deck of the ship!
One night Jackie even ate dinner in the captain's quarters!

(MORE)

HARLEY (CONT'D)

(then)

Sounds like a hot tip to me, Pattycakes.

With his feet up on the table, Harley gives a guilty grin. Fast Lane and some reporters snicker. Martha groans and throws balled-up paper at him. Roxy looks pissed.

Realizing she's been duped by Harley, Patty's face burns red.

PATTY

But I--

Patty turns and hurries out of the conference room.

JOE

Patty?!

Joe turns back to Harley. He quickly slaps Harley's boots off the table so fast that Harley spills coffee on himself and almost falls out of his chair.

JOE (CONT'D)

You're not a good enough reporter to be this big a prick. Meeting's over.

Harley collects himself as everyone streams out.

HARLEY

When did everyone get so goddamn serious?! This is a newsroom not the goddamn Daughters of the Revolution.

INT. PATTY'S DESK, BULLPEN - LATER

Self-conscious, Patty opens mail. Barb comes by.

BARB

Don't make lunch plans tomorrow. Joe's taking you to The Clam Shack.

PATTY

The Clam Shack? No, no, no. I know what that means.

Barb's already walking away.

PATTY (CONT'D)

But I don't wanna get fired! And clams make me throw up.

BARB

Don't kill the messenger, honey.

Upset, Patty keeps opening mail. She cuts her 8th finger.

INT. HAWAIIAN BAR & MOTEL - NIGHT

Patty commiserates over a scorpion bowl with Roxy.

PATTY

I don't deserve to go to The Clam Shack.

ROXY

Don't beat yourself up. It could have happened to anyone.

FAST LANE

Roxy, you're up!

Fast Lane waves Roxy over to the pool table to play with him, Martha and Doobie. Roxy looks concerned at Patty.

ROXY

Don't drink that whole bowl.

Roxy walks off to shoot pool as Patty proceeds to take a loooooooooong pull on the straw. She spots Joe enter, order from a doting waitress and go to his usual pinball machine.

Patty sucks the bowl dry and walks unsteadily towards him.

PATTY

Hey big boss man.

She attempts to coolly lean against the pinball machine but almost knocks over Joe's beer. Joe gives her a dismissive nod.

PATTY (CONT'D)

Look, I know what you taking someone to lunch at The Crab Shack means.

JOE

Actually I don't think you do.

Distracted, Joe loses a game. He sighs and turns to her.

JOE (CONT'D)

I always tell one of the research girls to do it. I was taking you myself cause I wanted to say even though you're fired as of Friday, *this is for the best.*

(motions to reporters at bar)

Look at this freak show. Once you work in tabloids you're stuck here, they won't let you back to legitimate media.

(quietly, almost to himself)

Believe me.

Joe's as sincere and worked up as we've seen him.

JOE (CONT'D)

Tabloids aren't in your blood and that's a good thing.

PATTY

But-- But tabloids are the future of journalism.

JOE

They're the future of media. They're the end of journalism.

(catches self, then)

Anyway. That's the little speech I would've given at lunch. But now you've heard it. Good night and good luck, Patty Shepard.

Joe goes to pump another quarter in the pinball machine... But Patty puts her hand on his.

PATTY

Maybe... *we could have dinner instead.*

Joe looks down at their hands and up at her.

JOE

Tabloids aren't in your blood and either is flirting to keep your job. Tomorrow's your last day. Go home and drink some water.

Joe takes his hand back and starts up another round of pinball. Rebuffed and shamed, Patty backs away, then turns and hurries out of the bar.

EXT. HAWAIIAN BAR & MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Patty hurries past the motel pool (where some patrons hang out smoking weed and sit at patio tables) on her way to the parking lot.

SCOOTER

Hey! New girl!?

Scooter (the handsome reporter Roxy warned her about) hurries out behind her. He holds up her jacket.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

You forget your jacket? Where you headed?

PATTY

Home - for good. Don't worry, they'll be a new 'new girl' next week for you to hit on.

Patty grabs her jacket. He runs in front to stop her.

SCOOTER

Sorry to hear. I hear the Examiner's a tough racket. Hey maybe I can put in a good word at *The Globe*. What kind of stuff are you working on?

PATTY

Nice try.

SCOOTER

I can't help if you're gonna be secretive. Me? I'm cracking a big scoop this week.

(pats his messenger bag)

I'll probably be running *The Globe* pretty soon if this thing is as big as I think.

Scooter motions for them to go back the bar.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

C'mon. Now how about that drink?

PATTY

Sure.

But Patty isn't following him. She just stands there a beat.

PATTY (CONT'D)

Let's get one back at your place.

Scooter smiles, unable to believe his luck.

INT. BEDROOM, BACHELOR APARTMENT - LATER

Scooter and Patty lay in a post-coital tangle in his bed, passed-out. He snores.

Patty cracks an eye open. Seeing Scooter's asleep, she starts to inch away. Slipping on her clothes, she creeps across the room...

... to a messy desk filled with papers, electric typewriter and his messenger bag. She riffles through his bag.

INT. HALL, NATIONAL EXAMINER - MORNING

With a stride in her step, Patty cruises down the hall. Roxy passes on roller skates.

ROXY

The bullpen was betting you were gonna call in with the Irish flu. Where'd you disappear to last night?

PATTY

You could say I got lucky.

Watching her new friend walk by her, Roxy looks back with concern and almost skates right into Doobie zipping up from the men's room.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Joe's working at his desk. Patty knock-knocks on the ajar door.

JOE

(without looking up)
No need to apologize.

PATTY

I wasn't planning on it.

Patty walks into the office. Annoyed, Joe keeps working.

JOE

I didn't ask you in.

PATTY
I've got a story.

JOE
And I just posted a classified for your job.

PATTY
One word: Manson.

Joe straightens up. For once, he has her attention.

PATTY (CONT'D)
A prison guard on Manson's cell block at Vacaville has given the first insight into his life behind bars. His routines, meals, behavior. Even excerpts of his journals and song lyrics---

JOE
Where'd you hear this?

PATTY
(proud of herself)
I've got my sources. Let's just say I scooped someone at *The Globe* and--

Before she can finish, Joe presses his INTERCOM BUTTON.

JOE
Mr. Zino, you're not gonna believe this.

FRANK (O.S.)
Better be good. I'm eating lunch.

Patty stares at the intercom - excited and intimidated. Joe nods at Patty.

PATTY
Hello!? Sir!? Mr. Zino. I'm Patty. Patty Shepard. I-

Joe widens his eyes and motions for Patty skip the formalities. Patty nervously clears her throat.

PATTY (CONT'D)
(restarts pitch)
One word: Manson. A prison guard on Manson's cell block at Vacaville has given the first insight--

Joe holds up a hand for her to stop and addresses the intercom.

JOE
You were right, Mr. Zino.

FRANK (O.S.)
I didn't build this paper by being wrong.

Patty looks from Joe to the intercom - they're not paying attention at all to her.

JOE
It's Fast Lane.

FRANK (O.S.)
Never liked him. Too tan.

JOE
Let's talk about how to best handle--

But Frank clicks off the intercom. Baffled, Patty looks to Joe.

PATTY
I don't understand.

With a shrug, Joe swivels towards the window overlooking the bullpen.

JOE
Enjoy the show.

INT. BULLPEN, NATIONAL EXAMINER - CONTINUOUS

The sound of an office door banging open. Everyone in the bullpen glances up from their phones or slows their typing fingers. Even Harley puts down his football.

A rare sight among the bullpen, Frank strides past a handful of reporters who straighten up as he passes.

Only Fast Lane is oblivious. He gossips over the phone with his back towards the rest of the bullpen. Behind him Frank approaches with a cigarette in his mouth.

FAST LANE
(on phone)
Totally, baby. George Peppard is the dullest stakeout in Hollywood. Four days of watching him and all he did was play poker and masturbate, baby--

Frank inhales so he has a nice glowing ember as he approaches from behind.

He leans in and ashes his cigarette in Fast Lane's ear.

FAST LANE (CONT'D)

Argggh!

Fast Lane screams and falls out of his chair, swatting the ash out of his ear.

FAST LANE (CONT'D)

Jesus!? What the hell--

FRANK

Don't curse at me, son. Now get out of my publication.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE, NATIONAL EXAMINER - CONTINUOUS

Joe and Patty stand by the window watching a humiliated Fast Lane hastily grabbing his things and scrambling out as Frank returns to his office and shuts the door.

JOE

Don't feel too bad for Lane, he'll get scooped up by one of the other rags.

Patty is aghast.

PATTY

What the hell just happened?

JOE

I slipped a different scoop to a handful of reporters to see if we had a mole. I gave Fast Lane the Manson story. Presumably he got a pretty penny to leak it to The Globe and then somehow you got your hot little hands on it.

Patty's mind is spinning.

PATTY

But-- What -- The Manson story's fake?

JOE

Close your mouth before the flies get in.

PATTY

Oh my god. I've pitched two fake stories in one week. No wonder I'm fired.

JOE
 Fired? You just got staffed.
 Congratulations.

Joe points to Lane's desk in the bullpen.

PATTY
 I don't know what to believe right now.

JOE
 You still don't get it? This job isn't
 about whether it's real or fake news.
 It's about how far you'll go to get it.
 I've got a feeling you went pretty
 goddamn far.
 (smiles)
 Guess I had you all wrong, Patty.

Joe pats her on the back and goes back to his desk.

JOE (CONT'D)
 Welcome to the island of misfit toys.

INT. HAWAIIAN BAR & MOTEL - HAPPY HOUR

Patty's at the bar being inundated with reporters (Roxy, Harley, Dr. Bob, Doobie, Martha) congratulating her.

MARTHA/DR. BOB/DOOBIE
 Great to have another gal on staff/ Put
 it on my tab/ I got these drinks!

HARLEY
 Everybody shut up. I got this round.

PATTY
 You should be buying drinks for the rest
 of my career for almost getting me fired.

HARLEY
 Did I almost get you fired?
 ("Greek" accent)
*Or did I test your meddle and you passed
 with flying colors?*

Patty spits an ice cube at Harley as he hands out the drinks.

HARLEY (CONT'D)
 Cheers to Pattycakes! Hope you like your
 new gig. Otherwise you're fucked, cause
 no decent paper will hire you now!

They all laugh and drink.

PATTY
 Thank you for all this.
 (hops off bar stool)
 Wish I could stay. But I actually got a
 little work to do.

Roxy and the crowd all roar with drunken protests.

PATTY (CONT'D)
 What can I say? I inherited a ton of hot
 tips from Fast Lane!

INT. PATTY'S "NEW" DESK, BULLPEN - NIGHT

The offices are mostly dark. At her new desk in the middle of the empty bullpen, Patty bangs away at her typewriter.

FRANK (O.S.)
 I made coffee.

Patty SCREAMS. Frank stands in his doorway drinking from his mug like it's a normal work day. It's the first time Patty's been in a room with him and she smiles nervously.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Burning the midnight oil. Good for you.

Frank approaches and peers at her typewriter but Patty swivels to block her work.

PATTY
 Just working on some notes. I get my best
 work done at night.

FRANK
 Me too. To my wife and children's dismay.
 They don't understand this job never
 ends.

PATTY
 I'm sure the pressure is immense.
 Everyone wants to know what Frank Zino
 will do next.

FRANK
 Yes! Yes! I do all the innovating and yet
 they still call me a smut peddler.
 (then)

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

Sometimes I want to step on the gas and drive straight into a wall just so I can watch all those lemmings behind me crash and burn.

Frank stares ahead, lost in thought. It's awkward. Patty clears her throat.

PATTY

They called Hearst and Pulitzer 'smut peddlers' back in their day too.

Snapping out of it, Frank looks at Patty with fresh eyes - *has he found kindred spirit?*

FRANK

You know who Rupert Macon is?

PATTY

Sure.

FRANK

Good. Starting tomorrow you're gonna be investigating him for me.

Patty can't believe her ears. Frank nods and heads out for the night. As he exits, she calls out.

PATTY

Don't drive off any cliffs!

Waiting till he's gone, Patty gets back to typing.

SMASHCUT TO:

INT. LATE NIGHT DINER, WEST PALM BEACH - LATER THAT NIGHT

A diner across the street from *The Palm Beach Post*

ROBERT

'Sometimes I want to step on the gas and drive straight into a wall just so I can watch all those lemmings behind me crash and burn,' Zino says, a far-off look in his eye.

A cute buttoned-up reporter (ROBERT from Patty's desk photo) reads a handful of pages over across from Patty.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

That's Frank Zino's direct quote?

PATTY

Of course. They all are.

ROBERT

The reporter who slept with Bowie, the guy getting a cigarette in his ear, Zino asking you to look into Macon. Patty, this is-- this is-- this is incredible!

Robert catches himself, looks around and quiets down.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

This is incredible.

PATTY

Finally 'get me staffed at The Post-incredible'?

ROBERT

As short-sighted and sexist as my boss is, even he couldn't turn down staffing you if it meant landing a story like this.

PATTY

"My Time At The Tabs."

(mimes headline)

What they're doing over there isn't just destroying journalism, it may be criminal. In another week or two and I'll have enough for a full Sunday expose.

ROBERT

Why stop there? Stay on another month. You're on the inside and have Zino's trust. The guy hasn't done an interview in 10 years. I heard he's in over his head with the New York mafia.

PATTY

The amount of secrets and sleaze in that office rivals anything in the publication.

(shudders)

I need a shower.

ROBERT

This could be a six or seven part series. With your reporting and my seasoned editing, this could be bigger than the Post's series on Indian casinos.

(smiles, affectionately)

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
I'm proud of you. And hey, I'm really
sorry I've been so busy lately.

Robert grabs Patty's hand across the counter. She beams.

PATTY
You mean the series that won the
Pulitzer?

INT. BEDROOM, PATTY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

An apartment of someone with no life - books and
newspapers everywhere, a cat. Post-coital, Patty and
Robert lie in bed, kissing.

PATTY
It's been a while since we went at each
like that.

ROBERT
What can I say? You got me really
excited.

Robert sits up, lights a smoke.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
I never asked. How the hell'd you get the
Manson story out of that punk at *The
Globe*?

Patty hesitates, then takes a drag of Robert's cigarette.

PATTY
I have my ways. I drank him under the
table and got him talking.

They kiss again. Robert gets up and starts washing up by
the sink as Patty stays in bed smoking.

PATTY (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Maybe I do have tabloid in my blood.

THE END