

DEADLINE

By

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&

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Based on

The E. C. Comic

SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES

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* SALMON Revised Pages	5/22/91

5/21/91

1.

FADE IN:

A1 INT. SMALL ENCLOSURE - VERY CLOSE ON CHARLIE - DAY A1

He stares at the CAMERA.

CHARLIE

My name's Charlie MacKenzie. I'm a newspaper man. At least I was. A damn good one. Do anything to get a story. That was my reputation. Anything. Damn right. The way I looked at it, the people had a right to know. First amendment. That's what this country's all about, right? I worked some high class papers in the past. Some pretty good magazines...But I had just one little problem.

(smiles)

I just liked the taste of the stuff. Just liked the way it went down. Nice and smooth. More I drank, the smoother it got. Now I don't think the booze helped me in my work. I don't say bein' a drunk makes you a better newspaper man or anything like that -- but I do think they got down on me too much. I was still the best guy on the crime beat right to the end. I could always write a great lead, always write a phrase that would knock 'em dead... They can't teach that, you know. No goddamn school of journalism can teach you how to write. It's an art. And I was good at it -- but when they don't want you anymore -- when they got it in their head that you've had it -- well, what the hell's a fella gonna do?

1 OMIT

1*

2 OMIT

2*

5/21/91

2 - 2A.

3 INT. BULL'S EYE BAR - SKID ROW - NIGHT

3

A man with his head down on the bar -- seemingly asleep.
It's CHARLIE MACKENZIE.
He hasn't shaved in a week.
Hair messed up.
Collar open, tie askew...

*
*
*
*

5/20/91

3.

3

CONTINUED

3

An empty shot glass in the f.g.
The BARTENDER leans close --

MIKE
You sleeping, Charlie?

Charlie's eyes pop open.

CHARLIE
Just restin' my eyes, Mike.

MIKE
It's awful late. Gettin' close to midnight. You told
me you had a meetin' over at the newspaper--

*

CHARLIE
Yeah, sure. Goin' in to pay Phil Stone a little
surprise visit. But I got time for one more.

MIKE
Maybe you better lay off -- How about a cup of
coffee?

Charlie gathers himself -- straightens his tie, collar, jacket...

CHARLIE
I can lay off any time I want, Mike.

MIKE
Charlie, I'm talkin' to you as a friend here. If
you're gonna go see somebody about a job, do
yourself a favor, go home, shave, get yourself
cleaned up --

Charlie suddenly becomes belligerent --

CHARLIE
I don't need any good grooming advice from you,
Mike. Just who the goddamn hell you think you're
talking to?

Mike immediately gets defensive.

MIKE
Charlie, I was just tryin' to help. I didn't mean
anything by it --

*

Pours Charlie a shot of whisky.

5/20/91

4.

3

CONTINUED

3

*

CHARLIE

I may be a little down on my luck, but I've been there. Right at the top. I've talked things over with senators, millionaires, sports champs, you name it. I don't need to hear any shit from some drink pusher workin' in a skid row gin joint.

MIKE

Hey, Charlie, back off. I said I was sorry.

Charlie calms down as quickly as he flared up.

CHARLIE

Okay, I just wanted to keep things straight. Sorry if I got a little rough, okay?

Runs his fingers through his hair.

Adjusts his lapels one more time.

Downs his drink in one gulp, stands to leave, then freezes in place as a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN (VICKI) glides to a seat at the bar.

She's a knockout.

Soft clinging knit dress, high-heeled sandals, long tan legs...

Charlie moves toward her, moth to the flame --

CHARLIE

Well, hello -- hey, Mike, I'll buy one for the lady. And tell you what, take a quarter and play my favorite song on the jukebox.

He smiles self-importantly and sits next to Vicki.

CHARLIE

So, what's a pretty lady like you doing here alone? You waiting for someone?

Mike pours her a drink, then moves to the jukebox.

VICKI

Nobody special.

5/20/91

5.

3

CONTINUED

3

CHARLIE

See, I'm a reporter. I always try to get the facts. Good lookin' girl sittin' alone in a skid row bar, real good chance she's a hooker. It's just a question. I'm not making a value judgment.

VICKI

Even though it's none of your business, I'm not for hire -- I'm real particular.

CHARLIE

Good. Glad to hear it.

VICKI

You're glad you won't be asked to sleep with me? That's kind of insulting, you know.

CHARLIE

Well hey, I wouldn't mind sleeping with you --

VICKI

Wouldn't mind, huh? Well, don't do me any favors --

CHARLIE

Let's start over. I would be deliriously happy to sleep with you.

She lifts her glass.

VICKI

I guess we're doin' a little better -- your health, uhh...

CHARLIE

Charlie. My name's Charlie.

VICKI

Real friendly guy. I like you, Charlie. You're a smart ass, but I like you.

CHARLIE

Thanks. I like you too, uhhh...

VICKI

Vicki.

CHARLIE

Vicki...I don't think I've ever seen you in here before --

5/20/91

6.

3

CONTINUED

3

VICKI

You come here every night or something?

CHARLIE

I told you, I'm a reporter. I work the crime beat. Murder, rape, robbery. I come here a lot on business. Maybe I oughta do an interview with you -- what's your story?

VICKI

You know my story. I'm pretty.

She smiles; he smiles back.

4

EXT. SECOND RATE JEWELRY STORE - NIGHT

4

Charlie and Vicki peering in through the plate glass window.
Traffic streaming behind...

4A

INSERT - SHOWCASE - A PAIR OF DIAMOND EARRINGS

4A

A small price tag nearby --
Two hundred dollars.

4B

CHARLIE - VICKI

4B

Stare at the earrings.

CHARLIE

*

Look at this, hard to believe they keep all this ice right here in the window at night. they must have a break-in twice a week -- look at those earrings, bet they'd look good on a pretty girl like you...

VICKI

*

I never been that much for jewelry.

CHARLIE

*

Aw come on -- Maybe you've got some nice boyfriend and he'll buy 'em for you.

VICKI

What makes you think I got a boyfriend?

5/20/91

7.

4B

CONTINUED

4B

CHARLIE

Just checkin'.

VICKI

I don't need to be checked out, Charlie. Let's just you and me have a good time, but I don't need any or checkin' -- Okay?

*

CHARLIE

Okay, no problem. I was just tryin' to figure out how things stood.

*

VICKI

That's okay, Charlie. No harm askin'...

*

They move off.

5

EXT. DOWNTOWN CITY STREET - SKID ROW - NIGHT

5

They walk along the crowded sidewalk --
Vicki slips her arm in his.

VICKI

You workin' on some special story now?

CHARLIE

No, I'm free-lancing. I left The Globe a couple of years back. I'm batting around a couple of book ideas with my agent -- You know it was right in this block that a punk named Sonny Capeletti stabbed his girlfriend -- It was a few years back -- I got an exclusive break, talked to Sonny himself. He found out she'd been doin' the trick with some other guy.

VICKI

You think she deserved it?

CHARLIE

Look, you report the facts -- but every story's got an angle. You give 'em the facts, but you milk the story for the best twist. The news is like show business, you got to entertain people.

VICKI

You didn't answer the question, Charlie.

*

5/20/91

7A.

5 CONTINUED

5

CHARLIE

*

I don't know...How do I know what anybody
deserves?

VICKI

*

Yeah. I guess you're right. Everybody's got their
own deal --

6 INT. CORRIDOR - ANGLE OUT ON CITY STREET - NIGHT

6

Charlie and Vicki stop in front of an old apartment building.

5/20/91

8.

6

CONTINUED

6

VICKI

This the site of another gruesome murder?

CHARLIE

Nope. This is where I live.

VICKI

Jesus, Charlie -- this is a dump.

CHARLIE

No kiddin'. Hey look, I'm a little down on my luck.

VICKI

What about your book deal?

CHARLIE

Hey, those things take time --

VICKI

You gonna ask me in?

CHARLIE

Yeah. Come on up, baby. I got a bottle of some real good stuff...

They enter --

VICKI

You like to have a drink now and then, huh, Charlie?

CHARLIE

What's that supposed to mean?

VICKI

I guess it means just what it says, you like a drink now and then.

CHARLIE

You got a problem with that?

VICKI

If I did I wouldn't be here, would I?

CHARLIE

Okay. You tell me. Why are you here?

VICKI

Maybe I'm like you. I'm just lookin' for a story.

She moves past him, starts down the corridor.

5/20/91

8A.

6A INT. SMALL ENCLOSURE - VERY CLOSE ON CHARLIE - DAY 6A
He stares at the CAMERA.

CHARLIE

I don't know what it was about this babe. Oh, sure -- she was good looking, great body. Probably knew how to use it. But I've been with lookers before. Lot of 'em -- She was never going to be a nuclear scientist and she wasn't exactly a saint. Nobody in their right mind would have called her a nice girl. But...I wasn't looking for nice girls. I left all that crap behind a long time ago... but this one, she set off something that made me feel - I don't know. Real. Back in touch. I was always a ladies man -- never had any trouble meeting them. Lots of girlfriends. Couple of wives. But...they all drifted away. After a while women didn't seem so important. It was the booze, I guess. I don't know. Anyway, I thought this one could be special. Maybe make me feel like I was twenty-five years old again... Something about her just made me feel like I could get it all back.

7 INT. CHARLIE'S FLOP HOUSE APARTMENT - MORNING 7

Just one room and a bath.
Peeling walls.
Threadbare furniture.
Hot plate.
Books and papers stacked all over.
Vicki is sitting on the small bed, putting on her bra.

VICKI

I gotta go, honey.

*

5/20/91

9.

7

CONTINUED

7

He calls out from the bathroom.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Where?

VICKI

*

It's nine a.m.. Most people go to work in the morning. They're not free-lancers, like you...

Charlie steps out of the bathroom.

He's now clean shaven.

Pulls on a clean white shirt.

His anger comes from out of nowhere, startling her.

CHARLIE

Deadbeats, like me, you mean?

VICKI

*

No, that's not what I mean. I didn't say that.

CHARLIE

Sorry. I guess I just... don't want you to go.

VICKI

*

I don't want to go either, hon. I had a real good time.

She stands, walks across the room.

Continues getting dressed.

CHARLIE

Why don't you meet me for lunch?

VICKI

Guess you like me, huh?

CHARLIE

Yeah. Can't get enough.

VICKI

Look Charlie, Let's get a few things straight. I'm not lookin' for something permanent. I've had a lot of boyfriends. Real solid relationships don't seem to work for me. I don't like gettin' tied down. But I like meeting guys. Seeing somebody new. It's kind of exciting. Like an adventure -- I don't know, like a release...

CHARLIE

Sure, I get it. It's like you're the guy.

5/21/91

10.

7

CONTINUED

7

VICKI

Yeah. I guess so. I never thought about it like that.

CHARLIE

I'm gonna make it real easy for you, sweetie, we had a great night, and there's the door. You don't ever have to show up here again.

*

VICKI

You mean it? That's the way you feel.

CHARLIE

Yeah. I got my own problems.

*

VICKI

I like that, Charlie. That's a great attitude.

Pause.

VICKI

Look, I mean it's okay if we see each other some more -- but I just don't want you to think it's gonna go anywhere.

CHARLIE

I just asked you to lunch, not to get engaged.

VICKI

I only get a half hour break. I don't usually eat lunch --

CHARLIE

I'll be at Mike's place around 12:30 -- I'm gonna go see my old boss, Phil Stone, then I gotta go see my sister.

*

VICKI

You gotta sister?

*

CHARLIE

Yeah. Lives nearby. She and I are real close.

*

Begins to knot his tie.

8

INT. NEWSROOM - THE GLOBE - MORNING

8

A spruced-up Charlie walks with an officious young SECRETARY. Heavy newspaper activity all around. Reporters hammering out copy. Bustling messengers...

5/21/91

10A.

8

CONTINUED

8

SECRETARY

I'm sorry Mr. MacKenzie, but Mr. Stone is too
busy to see you now --

5/16/91

11.

8

CONTINUED

8

CHARLIE

How do you know that if you don't ask him? I'm an old friend --

SECRETARY

He doesn't see anyone without an appointment.

CHARLIE

Okay. Make me an appointment.

SECRETARY

I can't do that until I discuss it with Mr. Stone. If you'd care to leave your card, we'll get back to you --

Charlie sees Phil Stone across the way --

*

CHARLIE

*

Phil, hey Phil...

He scowls when he sees Charlie.

STONE

Charlie MacKenzie, how are ya, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Great, Phil. Look, I'd like to talk to you about a job...

STONE

*

I'm awful busy, Charlie. Sorry, maybe some other time --

CHARLIE

Five minutes, Phil. Just hear me out.

STONE

Okay. Five minutes.

Charlie follows him back toward his cubicle.

CHARLIE

*

It's really good to see you, Phil -- Been a long time. How are Norma and the boys?

STONE

Fine, fine.

5/16/91

12.

8

CONTINUED

8

CHARLIE

I ran into Leon last week. We had a good laugh. He reminded me about the exclusive I got you on Roy Angel? Remember that? The Globe had his confession before the cops did... We used to make the D.A. squirm, didn't we?

*

STONE

Yeah, sure we did, Charlie...

CHARLIE

And the Iceman story. Remember that guy who found the stiff in his ice locker? He called me instead of the police. I followed that case for weeks --

This gets to Stone --

*

CHARLIE

Give me another chance, Phil.

STONE

I wish I could, Charlie. But --

CHARLIE

Things'll be different now. I'm going to quit drinkin'.

STONE

I heard that one before. Nothing ever changed.

CHARLIE

Look...I met this girl. She's made me see I've been wasting myself. I still got a lot left. All I want is a chance. I'm a damn good reporter, Phil. You know that. I need a break --

STONE

It's not gonna work, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Damn it, Phil -- I just want a chance. Just one goddamn chance.

Pause.

STONE

I'll tell you what, I'll give you a trial run. You want a job, go out and show me you can still bring in a story --

*

5/21/91

13.

8

CONTINUED

8

CHARLIE

Damn right -- I'll get you a page one break, Phil.

STONE

Get me a murder, Charlie...something juicy. You do that, you got your job back.

CHARLIE

Great. I knew I could count on you Phil -- listen, how about a little cash advance? I'm kind of hard up.

STONE

Can't do it now. But, I'll tell you what, you catch a hook on a hot break and the cash drawer'll pop open. You can use Felsen's desk out in the newsroom. He's out of town until the weekend...

CHARLIE

I won't let you down, Phil. I'm gonna give it everything I got.

STONE

That's a deal. Something real juicy, Charlie.

8A OMIT

8A

9 OMIT

9

10 OMIT

10

10A INT. CORRIDOR - TENEMENT APARTMENT HOUSE - DAY

10A*

Charlie MacKenzie comes up the stairwell.
Knocks on a paint-peeling door.
After a moment, it cracks open.
A middle-aged woman peers out --
This is Charlie's sister MILDRED.

MILDRED

It's the first of the month. I knew you'd be showin' up.

CHARLIE

Hey, you gonna be happy to see your brother --

*

5/21/91

13A.

10A CONTINUED

10A*

MILDRED

I am happy to see you, Charlie. And you ought to be happy to see me. But you don't care about seeing me. You just want another loan, don't you?

CHARLIE

*

Christ, look, I've had a bad run of luck. But things are changin'. I just got a job today. Only thing is they won't pay me until I bring in a big story -- Look, I'm strapped. You think I like askin? You want to see me beg?

She opens the door.

MILDRED

Come on in, Charlie.

10B INT. MILDRED'S APARTMENT - DAY

10B*

Charlie enters.

Mildred starts for the kitchen.

CHARLIE

Ya know you and I ought to try and get along -- you're the only family I got.

MILDRED

Save the speech, Charlie. I'll give you the money... You know you'd think you'd come and visit me every once in a while just to make it look good. But no, you only show up for the rent money --

CHARLIE

Listen, it's not like I don't have any feeling for you --

She takes a roll of cash out of a cookie jar.

MILDRED

This is the last time, Charlie. You hit me up for five hundred every month. And I been sucker enough to give it to you. But this is it -- Don't come back any more.

CHARLIE

Aw come on, Mildred --

MILDRED

-- I mean it. I don't want to watch you kill yourself with booze. Forget all the money you owe me -- just stay away.

5/21/91

13B.

10B CONTINUED

10B*

CHARLIE

*

Listen, get off your high horse. You got it all wrong. You get a goddamn disability pension -- I've got nothing. I'm gonna be out there pounding the pavement every day. You'll see my byline and be glad you helped me through this --

She holds the money in front of him.

MILDRED

Okay, okay, I've heard enough. Just take it and get out.

He takes the money.
Puts it in his pocket.
Heads for the door.
Charlie looks back.

MILDRED

I know you're going to head straight to some bar and drink yourself stiff.

CHARLIE

*

I'll tell you something. Maybe this time you're wrong.

Closes the door behind him.

11 INT. BULL'S EYE BAR - SKID ROW - DAY

11

Vicki is seated at the rail, waiting.
Charlie enters, sits down next to her.

CHARLIE

You like a drink?

5/21/91

14.

11

CONTINUED

11

VICKI

Too early in the day for me.

CHARLIE

I got a job on the Globe today. I'm back on staff.
Crime beat.

VICKI

What about the book you were writin'?

CHARLIE

I'll put it on hold for awhile...I got news for you.
I'm gonna quit drinking. As of today. I been
hitting the bottle a little too hard lately. You know
how it goes. One thing leads to another. So, I'm
swearin' off the stuff while I'm on assignment.

Mike approaches --

CHARLIE

*

Hey, Mike, I got a big welcome home at the paper
today. They gave me my old job back -- even gave
me a cash advance. They said they miss havin' a
real pro around...

MIKE

Hey, congratulations, Charlie. I knew your luck
was gonna change...What'll it be?

CHARLIE

Two coffees.

MIKE

Goin' light?

CHARLIE

Quit drinking. As of today.

MIKE

Hey, Charlie, that's great. Even if you are my best
customer. Two coffees coming right up.

Moves off.

CHARLIE

I really would like a belt right about now to
celebrate -- but, well, you have to, you know, stick
to your principles or else you've got nothing...

VICKI

Just don't let it turn you into a dull guy, Charlie.
I'd hate to see you lose your personality.

5/21/91

14A.

11

CONTINUED

11

Right.

CHARLIE

*

5/20/91

15.

11A INT. SMALL ENCLOSURE - VERY CLOSE ON CHARLIE -
DAY

11A

He stares at the CAMERA.

CHARLIE

You might think that working at a tabloid is a step down. Not me. Far as I can see it's just a lot more honest. I don't have any illusions about what's real news and what's garbage. It's all garbage. It's just how you write the story, that's what the news is -- it's all interpretation. These high class newspapers pretend to be impartial, neutral. That's horse manure. The only thing they are is dull. Once wrote this great lead, "Blind Witness ID's Killer by Smell." That one went over big, readers loved it -- it's drama. It's all show business...

12 INT. NEWSROOM - THE GLOBE - DAY

12

Charlie checks a number in his well-worn phone book --

CHARLIE

Lt. Jameson, please...Roy, hi, it's Charlie MacKenzie. I'm doing a piece on homicide downtown, I'd like to come over and run some statistics by you...No, I'm not digging for dirt, I just want to check out some information...Shit, Roy, I don't want to talk to your P.R. guy, I want to talk to you... Roy... Roy?...

Dials another number...

5/20/91

15A.

12 CONTINUED

12

CHARLIE

Hey, Barney, MacKenzie here...Yeah, it's been awhile. So how are things in forensics these days, you still workin' nights? Could I stop by the morgue tonight? Oh, well, when are you back on duty?...Okay. Well, take care of yourself. Sure, I'll call you later...

Hangs up.

Stone leans in over his shoulder...

STONE

How's it goin', Charlie?

CHARLIE

Fine. I'm just breakin' in my old contacts.

STONE

Crime beat's only as good as your informant's, right Charlie?

CHARLIE

Somethin's gonna break, Phil. Something good. I'm gonna deliver for you, big time.

STONE

I hope so, Charlie. I hope so.

Charlie watches as Stone moves away.

13 INT. CHARLIE'S FLOP HOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

13

Charlie and Vicki in bed.

*

He kisses her stomach -- works his way up the creamy white skin...

5/20/91

16.

13

CONTINUED

13

VICKI

So, Charlie, how was that for a story?

*

CHARLIE

Banner headline, baby.

She lifts her hand, gently pressing her fingertips against his lips --

VICKI

You really have gone all day without a drink? I mean I kinda thought maybe you had a problem.

*

CHARLIE

Damn right. I'm off the stuff. And tomorrow I'm gonna show the world what a real good newspaperman looks like. I'm gonna break a big story, I can feel it. And you know what I'm gonna do, when I get my cash advance? I'm gonna buy you those earrings.

She stands, slips on his shirt.
Walks across the way, opens her purse.
Takes out a cigarette -- lights it.

CHARLIE

I know down at the paper they've all got me written off as a drunk -- Lot of people got a real prejudice against drinking. It didn't really hurt my work, no matter what the bastards thought. I was still the best guy on the crime beat right to the end. I could always write a great lead --

He stands, slips on an old robe.
Lights a cigarette of his own.

VICKI

You really don't have to buy me the earrings, Charlie.

*

CHARLIE

You afraid I'm actin' like a boyfriend?

5/20/91

17.

13 CONTINUED

13

VICKI

*

I guess. This is a good thing. Let's not spoil it.

CHARLIE

I just want to show I got it together enough that I can give something to somebody.

Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to move in or get married...Hey, I don't even know your last name.

VICKI

*

Right. No last names, no phone numbers. Let's just enjoy being here. Okay?

14 INT. NEWSROOM - THE GLOBE - DAY

14

Charlie on the phone...

CHARLIE

Vince, I'm helping out a friend at The Globe, giving the kid some leads. You got anything? Come on, Vince, I know The Herald kills lots of stories they think are too spicy...Vince... I'll pay you...I mean the kid's desperate... Well, can you give me Rickman's number? I'll try him. Thanks, Vince.

Hangs up, dials again --

CHARLIE

Howard Rickman, please. It's Charlie MacKenzie...No, I'll call back.

Hangs up, dials --

CHARLIE

...Look, Foley, you got to help me out. I'm coming up dry...Well, can you meet me later on? I need this tonight...Okay, okay, I'll check in with you later...

The Secretary approaches --

SECRETARY

There's a mister Jack Reno to see you.

CHARLIE

Tell him I'm busy. Tell him to come back in a week.

5/19/91

17A.

SECRETARY

Maybe you better tell him yourself.

Charlie looks up --

JACK RENO stands across the way.

Charlie has no choice -- moves to Jack.

CHARLIE

How ya doin', Jack?

RENO

Hiya Charlie -- I'm doin' okay -- and listen, I'm gonna be doin' a lot better when you pay me.

*

CHARLIE

Yeah. I was going to look you up real soon.

RENO

Sure you were -- now let's see what you got in your wallet -- okay? Just hand it over so I can check things out.

*

CHARLIE

Look, if you can just wait a few days --

RENO

Charlie, give me your wallet or I'm gonna have to send some guys around to break your fingers. You don't want that, do you, Charlie? I mean right here, in front of all your friends? Come on, Charlie. I did my part. I loaned you money. No bank's gonna do that, right?

*

CHARLIE

Yeah, but the interest you guys charge --

*

RENO

Charlie -- A deal's a deal.

*

Charlie hands over his wallet.
Reno strips out the cash.

RENO

(smile)

Five hundred and twenty bucks -- not bad. You been holdin' out on me, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Leave me something to live on for Christ's sake. I just got a loan yesterday. I haven't even paid my rent yet. And I got to buy my girl this present --

RENO

I'm glad you got a girl, Charlie. That's nice.

CHARLIE

Just leave me a hundred?

RENO

No chance. I got a business to run.

CHARLIE

Yeah, but what am I gonna do?

RENO

What's the problem, Charlie? You got a good job here, don't ya?

*

5/16/91

18A.

14A INT. SMALL ENCLOSURE - VERY CLOSE ON CHARLIE - DAY 14A*

He stares at the camera.

CHARLIE

Sometimes a guy just can't catch a break. I got a whole city out there and nobody's killing each other. I'm desperate. Stone broke. And I wanna buy a girl some earrings. All that, and I'm 36 hours without a drink. It hurts.

15 INT. CORRIDOR - TENEMENT APARTMENT HOUSE - NIGHT 15

Charlie knocks on Mildred's door.

5/21/91

19.

15 CONTINUED

15

He straightens himself up as he hears her FOOTSTEPS --
The door opens a chain length.
She peers out.

CHARLIE

I was just in the neighborhood, thought I'd stop
by --

No move to open the door.

CHARLIE

I just wanted to see you, I'm still workin' on the
paper and I quit drinkin'...

*

MILDRED

You really mean it, Charlie?

*

CHARLIE

Yeah. I'm gonna be making big bucks real soon.
Just as soon as I land a story. Then you and me
will be square, I promise you...But, right now,
things are kind of tough on me because I'm going
to all these meetings and interviews and I don't
have the dough to --

*

The door slams.

CHARLIE

Mildred, hear me out! Mildred? Goddamn it!
Mildred! Goddamn it, I'm your brother! I need
some money!!

16 OMIT

16

17 INT. BULL'S EYE BAR - SKID ROW - NIGHT

17

Charlie takes a stool at the bar.
Mike looks up, approaches.

MIKE

How's it going?

CHARLIE

Lousy. Haven't got a goddamn thing -- this
goddamn city's dead. Wouldn't you know it -- just
when I need a good rip-shithouse murder, there's
zilch going on.

5/10/91

20.

17

CONTINUED

17

MIKE

You gotta keep at it, Charlie. That's the way it goes.

CHARLIE

You know so much about it, you keep at it --

MIKE

Charlie, come on...

CHARLIE

I'm telling you, I've called in favors right and left. Been listening in on the police band, been to the morgue, hospitals -- Nada.

MIKE

Charlie, it's only 9 o'clock --

CHARLIE

Pour me a drink, Mike --

MIKE

Charlie, I'm speaking to you as a friend. You got a chance to straighten things out, get back to work --

CHARLIE

I am working. There's nothing the matter with me. There's just nothing out there right now. I'm taking a break.

MIKE

What you ought to do is go on up the street to the Greek's, have something to eat, he makes great chili, pick you right up, have a cup of coffee -- relax a minute -- then get out there and find that story. I'm pullin' for you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I don't want to go to some Greek's greasy spoon. I'm thirsty. I'm broke. I've had a real hard day... You going to get me that drink, Mike?

MIKE

I'm your friend, Charlie. I'm not giving you any booze.

CHARLIE

You really want to be my friend?

MIKE

Sure. What'd ya need?

5/15/91

21.

17

CONTINUED

17

CHARLIE

Loan me a couple of hundred bucks. I'm in a jam with that girl I picked up in here, I made her some promises --

MIKE

Sorry, Charlie. I can't do it. I run a bar, not a bank.

CHARLIE

You sanctimonious son of a bitch. You won't loan me money. You won't sell me a drink -- What the hell good are you?

MIKE

I don't think you're gonna find your story in here, Charlie.

But Charlie is already out the door.

18

EXT. DOWNTOWN CITY STREET - SKID ROW - NIGHT

18

Charlie walks briskly, burning off his anger.
As he passes a well-lit store window, he catches a glimpse of himself.
Stops to look.
Mops the sweat from his brow.

CHARLIE

You look like hell, Charlie.

In the window is also the reflection of a blinking neon sign for NIKOS' GRILL.
Charlie's hands are trembling.

CHARLIE

Coffee. Cup of coffee...Maybe Mike's right.
Maybe I'll catch a break. I just got to pull myself together...

He turns and stares at the diner across the way ---

19

INT. NIKOS' GRILL - SKID ROW - NIGHT

19

A small Mom and Pop diner.
A pot of stale coffee sits on a hot plate.
A glass shelf holds a selection of pies and cakes.
A chalkboard shows minestrone is the soup of the day.
Charlie sits on a stool at the counter, trying to read a newspaper.
NIKOS STAVRO stands nearby.
He's a balding, heavy-set man in his early fifties...

5/10/91

22.

19

CONTINUED

19

NIKOS

So I said to the goddamn code inspector, what's the deal? You come around here every two months, you always find some little problem, you always trying to get me fined -- you know the truth if you don't pay these guys off they kill ya, that's all it is. These goddamn bureaucrats that work for the city are all crooks, all of 'em got their hand out, you know what I mean?

Charlie isn't interested in Nikos' problems.

CHARLIE

Yeah, I know what you mean. Now how about you just let me read the paper, okay?

Nikos shrugs, walks back into the kitchen area.

Charlie lights a cigarette...

Suddenly, VOICES explode from the back room --

NIKOS (VO)

And I said you're not going anywhere, you goddamn whore...

WOMAN (VO)

I'll do what I want. Take your filthy hands off me!

NIKOS (VO)

You're not going out tonight...

WOMAN (VO)

Yeah? Who's going to stop me?! You? You're pathetic --

She laughs.

The SOUND of furniture CRASHING to the floor --

WOMAN (VO)

Let go of me!

Her SCREAM suddenly cuts off --

Charlie leaps up...

Moves back into the kitchen.

20

INT. KITCHEN - NIKOS' GRILL - NIGHT

20

As Charlie walks into the greasy kitchen --

CHARLIE

Hey! What's going on in there?!

5/22/91

23.

20 CONTINUED

20

A door at the far end swings open.
Nikos appears -- looks stunned.

NIKOS

*

I...I killed her. I choke her to death.

Charlie moves forward to look into the back room --

21 CHARLIE'S POV - BACK ROOM - NIKOS' GRILL

21

A small, dingy apartment.
An old sofa covered with a knit afghan.
A formica kitchen table with liquor bottles, glasses and dirty coffee cups...
Overturned end table resting next to a broken lamp on the floor...
The naked body of a WOMAN partially covered by an old terrycloth dressing gown --

22 INT. NIKOS' GRILL - KITCHEN

22

Nikos sits on a stool hunched over the sink.
Charlie moves beside him --

CHARLIE

You want to talk?

Nikos looks up.

CHARLIE

That your wife in there?

NIKOS

Just leave me alone.

CHARLIE

Come on, talk a little. Get it off your chest.
What's your name?

NIKOS

Nikos.

Charlie reaches for his notepad and pen and begins to write.

CHARLIE

Nikos what?

NIKOS

Stavro.

CHARLIE

What happened? What was the fight about?

5/22/91

24.

22 CONTINUED

22

NIKOS

*

I strangle her. She's been playing around... I just couldn't take it anymore...I had her followed by a detective. She was picking up guys in bars. Bums, winos -- screwing them. She wanted to humiliate me. She was no good. She was just a tramp.

Charlie scribbles away --

NIKOS

Two years ago she came in, asked for work as a waitress. She could charm a snake. A month later I was married to her. She used to flirt with every man who came in. I didn't mind at first. I was proud to have such a young, good lookin' wife.

CHARLIE

Right. Big difference in your ages?

NIKOS

She's 28 and I'm 45. I hardly saw her any more. Out half the night, sleepin' half the day. All the time lying to me. I couldn't stand it. I loved her...Tonight when she said she was going out, I tried to stop her and ...she started laughin' at me --

His voice breaks.

NIKOS

God help me...

CHARLIE

We've got to call the police. I'll stay and help you with this. Where's the phone?

NIKOS

In there.

He points to the back room.

23 INT. BACK ROOM - NIKOS' GRILL

23

Charlie walks past the body of the murdered woman and picks up the phone.

CHARLIE

Phil Stone...It's MacKenzie. Hold 15-16 inches. I got a sizzler for you, Phil...

Looks back at the body --

5/22/91

25.

23

CONTINUED

23

CHARLIE

Guy just killed his wife... Wait, here's the kicker. He's suspicious, see, thinks she's two-timing him, so he hires a detective to follow her, finds out she's a nympho with a thing for -- get this -- winos. This is what I want to do, Phil -- get you hard copy tonight, then stick with hubby and do an "I Married a Nympho" feature follow-up. If you send me a photographer right away, we can get a gurney shot... Nikos' Grill at Eighth and Lomax. I'll --

There's a rustling SOUND across the room.
Charlie freezes.

CHARLIE

-- phone you back---

He rushes over to the body.
The woman moans and stirs slightly --
Charlie leans down...and gasps.
It's Vicki...
Her eyes are closed and there's a red welt across her throat.
His hand caresses her cheek.
Her eyes flutter open, look out vacantly, then seem to recognize him --

VICKI

Charlie...

His hands move down to her neck.

CHARLIE

Vicki...Oh, Christ, how could you do this to me?

He takes her by the throat --

VICKI

Charlie?

His face flushes red as he squeezes --
Hard.
Harder.
Finally, her head flops to the side, glazed eyes staring out...
Nikos appears in the doorway, meek and red-eyed, as Charlie is pulling the afghan off the sofa to cover the body --

NIKOS

You call the police?

CHARLIE

...Yeah. They're coming.

*

5/22/91

26.

23

CONTINUED

23

Nikos shuffles back out to the cafe.
Charlie crosses to the phone, dials 911.

CHARLIE

I'd like to report a domestic homicide... Nikos' Grill. Eighth and Lomax...My name's Charles MacKenzie. No, I didn't witness it, but the husband's confessed...

He presses down the receiver and dials another number.

CHARLIE

City Desk. . . It's MacKenzie. Are you ready for my feed? Okay, here goes...

As Charlie speaks, he stretches his hand across the table, uncaps a nearby whisky bottle and fills a glass.
He tosses it back and pours out another shot.

CHARLIE

*

Inflamed by jealousy, a distraught Lomax Park man squeezed the life out of his unfaithful wife as she laughed and taunted him. The husband, Nikos Stavro, reportedly a Greek immigrant, had hired a private detective to follow his wife Vicki because he suspected she had a lover. When he learned the details of her sordid secret life, he flew into a rage and strangled her. Quote "She wanted to humiliate me. She was no good. She was just a tramp," unquote -- Stavro wept as he confessed the murder to the police...

He belts down the drink, refills his glass.
Continues to dictate until the SOUND of an approaching police SIREN drowns him out --

24

INT. SMALL ENCLOSURE - VERY CLOSE ON CHARLIE - DAY 24

He stares at the CAMERA.
As he speaks, WE PULL BACK to reveal a bleak cell.
Charlie's wearing a straight jacket.

5/22/91

26A.*

24 CONTINUED

24

CHARLIE

I don't know what the hell it is, but I can never get a break. Of all the damn women in the world, of all the damn two-timers that are gonna get knocked off by their husbands, it just had to be her, didn't it? Yeah, too bad for Charlie. Anyway, the cops came and I confessed. You know why? It wasn't guilt or anything. It just made a better story...

Pause.

5/16/91

27.

24

CONTINUED

24

CHARLIE

So, now get this, I'm working on a book about my double life. Crime reporter and criminal... Great angle, huh?

Pause.

CHARLIE

I'm gonna start writing it up as soon as I get out of this thing. Only one little number I got to do first -
- I really would like to have a drink.

The CAMERA PULLS UP AND AWAY as he sits bound in the cell...

FADE.

THE END