

AM NEWS

**EPISODE 1-02
“WORKING FIRE”**

**WRITTEN BY
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EXT. AARON'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

A six-storey brick apartment building, without balconies, stands on a street with lots of little stores and decent pedestrian traffic.

The camera tilts up towards a window on the top floor.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BEDROOM - DAY

The bedroom looks like the rest of the apartment: white walls, clean, and very plain, with some nice decorative accents like vases and wooden masks.

Music leaks through the floor and sun pours in through the windows.

AARON MADER lays alone in his and KENDRA's queen-sized bed, on his side. He stirs slightly.

His alarm clock reads 10:09am.

He stirs some more, then cracks an eye, looking at the clock.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

AARON walks up to an apartment door on the fifth-floor hallway in pyjamas and a housecoat.

Music blares through the place.

He knocks on the door. No answer.

He bangs on the door. No answer.

He pulls a note from his housecoat pocket on an 8.5x11" sheet of paper, and tapes it to the door.

It reads: "Could you please turn the music down? I work nights and live above you. -Thanks"

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT KITCHEN - DAY

AARON looks at a stack of breakfast dishes on the kitchen counter, and a couple of frying pans on the stove.

He plugs the kitchen sink, starts filling it with hot water and dish soap, and puts the plates, cutlery, and cutting board in.

He turns off the tap, grabs a rag from a drawer, and starts scrubbing the dishes, placing them in the second sink compartment.

INT. WKKL TALK STUDIO - DAY

PATRICIA FELTS sits at the control board wearing headphones. She leans in with the mic almost touching her lips, smiling. She fires an event on the clunky computer, playing a "WKKL News Hour Update" bumper.

PATRICIA

Good morning, I'm Patricia Felts!
At 11 o'clock, the sun is shining,
and it's going to be a beautiful
day. We'll have your full WKKL
forecast coming up after the news.

She picks up a page from her sponsor log and holds it just beyond the mic.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

It's wing night at Mama's Fried
Chicken. Come in and see what
Mama's cooking at Mama's Fried
Chicken. 31-58 Westfield Avenue.

She puts the paper down on top of the stack.

PATRICIA

Our top story... We now go live to
WKKL's Blaine Watson for an update
on that bank robbery this
morning...

BLAINE WATSON's voice plays over the monitors in the room.

BLAINE (O.C.)

Patricia, I'm standing here outside
the bank where earlier today, two
men made a brazen heist. Police say
the robbers made off with over
10-thousand dollars...

She listens intently.

EXT. AVIVA'S STREET - DAY

AARON pulls up in his car outside AVIVA's townhouse condo complex.

WKKL spews from the stereo speakers.

He opens a text message between them.
[Note: IMs are in italics.]

AARON (TEXT)

Buzz.

He waits a moment.

AVIVA (TEXT)

Door's open. Walk in, don't knock.

He shuts the car off, undoes his seat belt, and exits the vehicle.

INT. AVIVA'S HOUSE - DAY

AARON enters the house right onto the living room.

AVIVA sits with her legs crossed on her couch.

All the blinds and drapes are closed tight, blocking all daylight.

She raises her arms in the air.

AVIVA

Hey, news man!

AARON shuts the door behind him.

AARON

Hey, Aviva.

AVIVA

What's happening in Camden?

AARON

Uh, a bank robbery. And I think they re-dedicated the Baird Bridge.

She does air quotes:

AVIVA

That's so weird. We're just going to call this bridge "whatever" now.

(CONTINUED)

AARON

Yeah...

AVIVA

What can I hook you up with today?
The ush?

AARON

Yeah, hopefully something to help
me sleep.

She pulls a large bag of weed out of her coffee table, along
with a small digital scale and a beer cup.

AVIVA

I have some MDMA, too.

AARON

Um, no... thanks.

AVIVA

That's cool.

She drops a few buds in the cup.

AVIVA

I've always thought about robbing a
bank.

AARON

These guys made of with 10 grand.

AVIVA

Oh well, pot is lucrative enough.
That'll be 1-10.

He pulls a folded wad of 20s from his pocket and hands it to
her.

AVIVA

Need change?

AARON

Yeah.

She takes the stack of money down the hallway to the
bedroom.

A moment later, she comes back with a 10 and hands it to
him.

(CONTINUED)

AVIVA

Well, it was good seeing you big
guy.

AARON

Yeah, I'll see you soon.

He leaves out the front door.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY

AARON sits in his living room in a T-shirt and gitch.

He busts up some bud in his fingers and rolls a joint.

He sparks it and takes a few puffs.

He leans back in the couch, then puffs again.

INT. WKKL STAFF BATHROOM - DAY

The tiny room has a sink, toilet, paper towel dispenser, and
garbage can.

PATRICIA sits fully dressed on the toilet, breaking up some
cocaine with a small razor blade on her cigarette pack.

She lifts the cigarette to her nose and snorts the line.
with a cut drinking straw, about 4" long.

She stands up and moves to the sink. She stares at herself
in the mirror.

She studies her eyes.

PATRICIA

Lord, get me through this day.

She studies her eyes a bit longer, then slightly smirks at
herself, stuffs some paper towels in her purse, and leaves
the room.

INT. WKKL TALK STUDIO - DAY

PATRICIA sits alert in the hot seat.

A bigger lady in scrubs, TINA CHURCHILL, sits at one of the
other microphones.

A commercial finishes, followed by a bumper for "Let's Talk
Mornings with Patricia Felts on WKKL."

(CONTINUED)

PATRICIA

11:16. It's poison prevention week. Joining me now is Tina Churchill. Tina's with the Poison Awareness Coalition.

She turns to face TINA.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)

Tina, good to see you again.

TINA

Thanks for having me back.

PATRICIA

I understand one of the major themes this year is asbestos. Tell us a little bit about how that encompasses the overall message.

TINA

Well, in an ideal world, every home, office, and store would be perfectly up to modern standards. That's just not the case. Many people probably don't realize in an older home, your floor tiles might be asbestos, or plumbing insulation. It was used frequently but testing has shown it to be highly toxic, especially when airborne and inhaled into the lungs.

PATRICIA

Are these older items in our homes making us sick?

TINA

As long as they're not disturbed, you're fine, but as older homes are renovated or the tiles start to chip or accumulate dings, you really should have a professional come in to check whether it is asbestos, and then have those professionals remove the asbestos properly.

PATRICIA

Is this an expensive service?

A small drop of blood hits the talk desk.

(CONTINUED)

TINA

It depends. A 200 square foot kitchen with old tiles might-

Blood starts to gush out of PATRICIA's nose. She quickly grabs the paper towel from her purse.

PATRICIA

I'm going to have to stop you there. We're going to take a quick break. We'll be back.

She fires the commercial break cart, holding paper towel to her face.

PATRICIA

I'm so sorry. I used to nosebleeds all the time as a kid. Now they just come every few years. Bad ones.

TINA

Oh my, no worries. Are you alright?

PATRICIA

I'm fine. Just allergies and the drastic temperature change.

BLAINE walks by the large glass pane separating the newsroom and talk studio.

She hits a button on the soundboard and leans in to the mic.

PATRICIA

Blaine! I need you to start your noon show early!

He shoots around, looks at her, and notices the bloody paper towel.

He gives her "one minute" sign language.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BEDROOM - DAY

Music continues to bleed through the floor.

AARON lays in bed, on his side, with his eyes open. He checks the alarm clock on the nightstand. 12:13pm.

He stirs somewhat, looking exhausted.

He gets back out of bed, just in his boxers, and starts to put on a pair of jeans strung across a chair in the corner of the bedroom.

INT. WKKL NEWSROOM - DAY

PATRICIA sits in the newsroom, holding a bloody paper towel to her face.

BLAINE pages her through the room's PA intercom.

BLAINE (O.C.)
Your nose has been bleeding for an hour. Maybe you should go to the hospital?

She waves her hand at him through the large window pane separating the newsroom from the talk studio as if he's being ridiculous.

BLAINE (O.C.)
What are you even still doing here?
Go home.

PATRICIA
(angrily)
Well, I don't really want to drive with a wad of paper towel on my face.

He shrugs and points his finger to his ear.

BLAINE (O.C.)
(mouths)
I can't hear you.

She grabs her purse and hastily exits towards the front of the station.

BLAINE (O.C.)
See you tomorrow!

He looks back at the computer and fires an event.

EXT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

A retro laundromat with a small storefront sits in a tiny stripmall.

AARON carries a medium-sized laundry sack with him and walks in the front door.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

AARON walks down a row of front-load washers. All have clothes inside spinning and splashing around in foamy soap.

He finds a couple of machines not in use near the back.

He opens one, lifts the bag up to the door, and dumps the his and KENDRA's clothes in. He adds detergent, then shuts the door, inserts some quarters and the machine starts to spin.

He looks around and spots an automatic coffee dispenser.

He walks up to it and inserts a dollar. He hits a button for "2 creamers" and a cup slides down and fills with creamy coffee.

He takes the cup over to a row of chairs perpendicular to his machine and sits down.

He's holding the cup, leans back, and almost immediately passes out.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

AARON is awoken suddenly by an ANGRY LADY.

She is large, black, and wielding a switchblade.

He tips the full cup of luke-warm coffee over his pants and crotch.

ANGRY LADY

You asshole!

He tries to diffuse her.

AARON

Whoa, what? What did I do?

ANGRY LADY

Your washer's been done for over 20 minutes. What the fuck?

She gets closer, waving the switchblade around.

AARON

I'm sorry, I haven't slept. Let me take care of it.

(CONTINUED)

He looks around, but no one's intervening. Most won't even look over.

ANGRY LADY

Some of us have lives... We can't just wait around for rich, white assholes like you to take a mother fucking nap, you mother fucking piece of shit.

AARON stands up.

AARON

Honest mistake. I'll move it over now. It's all yours. I'll even pay for your load.

ANGRY LADY

That's better.

She flicks the switchblade closed and tucks it into the waistline of her pants.

AARON moves past her as she eyes him down hard, and goes to his washer.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BEDROOM - DAY

Loud TV now bleeds through the floor.

AARON lays in bed, on his side, with his eyes open. He checks the alarm clock on the nightstand. 3:37pm.

He looks lethargic.

INT. WKKL NEWSROOM - NIGHT

AARON walks in the front door of the station, past the reception desk, into the newsroom.

He's wearing his camera bag and shoulder bag, and carrying his briefcase and a lunch bag.

KEN MCKIM sits at his usual desk, banging away at his keyboard.

AARON

Hey, Ken.

KEN breaks his focus, looking up at AARON as he moves around him.

(CONTINUED)

AARON sits at his usual desk, perpendicular to KEN.

KEN
You brought a lunch? That's new.

AARON
Kendra packed it for me.

KEN
I don't think I've ever seen you eat.

AARON dumps his stuff on the floor and places his lunch at the back corner of the desk.

AARON
I-

KEN
Coffee is not a meal!

AARON sits down and wakes up the computer.

KEN grabs a half-smoked cigar from an ashtray on his desk.

He sparks it, taking a puff.

AARON
Anything going on today?

KEN
I have no fucking clue what they did all day. Crime capital of the world, basically, and there's no local news in the queue.

AARON hits CTRL + ALT + DEL on the computer and enters his login credentials.

AARON
Anything on the scanners?

KEN
Just a couple of suicide threats.

AARON
That's it?

KEN
And some hooker got jumped.

He taps his cigar in the ashtray.

KEN (CONT'D)
Guess I'll be running copy from the
news wires all night.

AARON
Who do you have booked for your
show?

KEN
Let's see...

He scrolls upwards through the show wheel on his computer.

He uses airquotes:

KEN
I have a UFO "expert."

He puffs his cigar...

KEN
Someone on the detrimental effects
of smoking...

And exhales.

AARON
Are they in studio?

KEN
No, just a phone caller.

He scrolls some more.

KEN (CONT'D)
The mayor's going to join me off
the top.

AARON
In studio?

KEN
No! He lives in Philidelphia. He's
not coming over here.

AARON looks shocked.

AARON
The mayor of Camden doesn't live in
Camden?

KEN

You think the guy who axed the city's police force is going to live here?

AARON

Don't people care?

He ashes his cigar.

KEN (CONT'D)

No. No one cares about politics here. They want to get by hooking, drug dealing, or killing.

Some static comes across the police scanner.

POLICE SCANNER - FEMALE OPERATOR

Unit 4: we have a 22-year-old man heading west towards the Benjamin Franklin Bridge. Possibly suicidal. Code 3.

KEN

Eh, let him jump. One less scumbag.

AARON fishes his cigarette pack out of his shoulder bag.

AARON

You seem extra-irritable tonight. Should we have a drink?

KEN slips a whiskey bottle out of his top desk drawer, then pulls out two small glasses.

AARON (CONT'D)

Alright, I'm just going for a smoke. I'll be right back.

KEN

Sure, I'll get started without you.

AARON heads towards the front door and slips outside.

KEN starts to pour an ounce or two in each of the glasses.

He pounds back one of the glasses, then fills it back up.

KEN

Ahh!

He wipes his forearm across his lips.

(CONTINUED)

He eyes the levels in the cups, then fills his up a little more past the other one.

The police scanner buzzes.

POLICE SCANNER - FEMALE OPERATOR
Engine 12: We have a working fire
at 27-27 Polk Ave. Cross streets
are North 27th Street and North
28th. Building is a two-and-a-half
storey residential duplex. Code 4.

KEN slams the whiskey in his glass, then bolts towards the front door.

EXT. WKKL RADIO STATION - NIGHT

AARON stands outside the station, the transmitter towering over him from the roof of the tiny, one-storey building.

He looks towards Philadelphia's skyline, smoking with the cigarette hanging out of his mouth.

KEN comes bursting through the front door, startling AARON.

KEN
WORKING FIRE!

AARON
Shit!

The cigarette falls to the concrete sidewalk.

KEN
There's a working fire! Go! Go!

AARON looks at his phone.

AARON
I don't even start for 20 minutes.

KEN
Then go home 20 minutes early.

He holds the door open for AARON and they head back to the newsroom.

INT. WKKL NEWSCRUISER - NIGHT

The door lock unlocks and AARON comes walking up wearing his shoulder and camera bags.

He opens the door, slides the bag straps into his hand, and jumps in.

He tosses the bags to the passenger seat.

He sticks the key in the ignition and starts the car.

The engine revs and WKKL plays loudly through the stereo.

He turns it down, then notices the gas gauge is on empty and the warning light is lit.

His expression looks pissed.

AARON
Fucking Blaine!

AARON sighs.

He puts the car in drive and zips off.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

AARON inserts a fleet card into the gas pump.

He punches in his driver ID. The machine beeps a confirmation.

He undoes the gas cap and lifts the nozzle. He sticks it in the slot and pulls the trigger, setting the auto switch.

He leans with his back against the pump.

His phone rings. It's the station.

AARON
Hello?

KEN (O.C.)
Are you there yet? What's happening?

AARON
No, the cruiser was empty. I'm filling the tank.

(CONTINUED)

KEN (O.C.)
There's no time for that!

AARON hunches his brow.

AARON
What was I supposed to do... Go straight there and strand myself for something that's probably nothing?

The intercom by the pump buzzes.

INTERCOM (O.C.)
Excuse me, sir. It's dangerous to use a cell by a gas pump. The signals can cause static electricity. I have to ask you to disconnect that call.

The pump clicks and shuts off. A receipt slides out.

AARON
Did you hear that, Ken?

He hangs up the phone and slips it in his pocket.

He pulls the nozzle out of the car and puts it back on the pump.

He hastily rips the receipt off the machine and jumps in the car, peeling out.

EXT. POLK AVENUE - NIGHT

AARON loops around the block and parks close to North 27th Street.

He looks around for other news crews.

There are a dozen engines and four ambulances, but no reporters or police cars.

A shocking number of firefighters and paramedics are on scene.

The two-and-a-half storey duplex stands with empty lots of either side. An empty lot is also across the street from it, with houses on either side of the lot.

Raging flames shoot from two windows at the top middle of the house, and also from the second floor windows on the left side unit.

(CONTINUED)

The porch on the right unit is "birdcaged" in with security bars.

Quite a few people in the neighbourhood stand on the sidewalk in front of the empty lot across the street.

AARON pulls his DLSR camera out of his camera bag and pops the lens cap off. He slides the lens cap into the bag and puts the camera strap around his neck.

He starts to snap dozens of pictures, then pulls his cellphone out of his pocket.

He calls KEN in the newsroom.

AARON

Hey, this is definitely newsworthy. One side of the duplex is engulfed in flames and no other outlets are here yet. You want a live hit at nine?

He pauses.

AARON

OK, I'll call you shortly.

He hangs up the phone and slides it back in his pocket.

He looks around.

AARON

(under his breath)
Aren't there any fucking payphones anymore?

He looks around some more, then notices the back door of an ambulance ajar.

Inside, an OLDER WOMAN is being looked at by a female PARAMEDIC.

AARON cautiously approaches.

AARON

Excuse me?

PARAMEDIC

I'm sorry, you can't be here.

AARON

I just want to know if the lady with you is open to telling me

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

AARON (cont'd)
anything, either on or off the
record?

The woman looks over at the paramedic.

PARAMEDIC
How are you feeling? You don't have
to say anything.

She mulls for a moment.

OLDER WOMAN
What do you want to know?

AARON
Well, first of all, how're you
feeling? Are you alright?

OLDER WOMAN
My chest hurts a little bit, but I
feel fine.

AARON
May I record this?

She mulls again.

OLDER WOMAN
I'd rather you not.

AARON
No problem.

AARON grabs his notebook from his shoulder bag and a pencil.

AARON
I assume you live in the house?

The woman nods.

AARON
Which unit do you live in?

OLDER WOMAN
The one on the right.

AARON
It looks like the fire started next
door.

OLDER WOMAN

Yes. I must've fallen asleep on the couch. I woke up and my home was full of smoke.

She coughs, placing her fist over her mouth.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

Thick smoke.

The PARAMEDIC puts her stethoscope in her ears and lifts the back of the woman's shirt.

PARAMEDIC

I just need you to breath in deeply.

The OLDER WOMAN inhales.

PARAMEDIC

And breath out.

She exhales and coughs.

He scribbles down some notes.

AARON

What were your neighbours like?

OLDER WOMAN

Oh, they were my tenants. A nice, young family. Early 30's with two toddler boys.

AARON

Twins?

OLDER WOMAN

No.

AARON looks a bit worried.

AARON

Do you know if they were home?

OLDER WOMAN

I don't think so. They all go for a walk to the park around this time.

AARON

Did you see anything else?

(CONTINUED)

OLDER WOMAN

No, the firefighters just broke through my birdcage to help me out and then I've been here since.

AARON

And your name?

OLDER WOMAN

Mmm, I'd rather not give you that, either.

AARON slides the book back into his shoulder bag.

AARON

OK, thank you. Good luck, mam.

He turns around and walks a small distance from the ambulance.

He looks at the firefighters as they douse the flames and snaps some more pictures.

INT. WKKL TALK STUDIO - NIGHT

KEN sits in the hot seat at the computer.

The mayor, DOUGLAS HASSLER, sits across from him.

A commercial cart winds up.

KEN

Here we go.

He puts his headphones back on, but HASSLER sits there. He's a big guy but doesn't have a mean demeanor.

A "WKKL's Night Pulse with Ken McKim" plays.

KEN

Good evening. Welcome back. If you're just joining us, we're talking to the big man himself. It's Camden's mayor Douglas Hassler.

KEN turns to the mayor. HASSLER smirks briefly.

KEN (CONT'D)

We have to talk about policing in this county. You shut down Camden's police force a few years ago. It was highly unpopular.

(CONTINUED)

HASSLER nods.

KEN (CONT'D)

Very controversial. But, it's turned out to be a wildly successful project.

HASSLER

We simply couldn't afford our police force anymore. We collect 437-dollars, on average, from each of our citizens a year. That's tax, fees for city services. All in. It's not a lot of money to begin with, and then we had to honour a very lofty police union contract which nearly bankrupted us.

KEN

Did going to a county-wide force prevent that reality?

HASSLER

We have a long way to go. There is rampant crime and the Camden Police were losing the battle. Now we have financial resources from other areas of the state. We can target and reduce crime and that's the first step.

KEN pulls a cigar from his pack and points it towards the mayor. He takes one.

KEN passes HASSLER his lighter. HASSLER sparks his cigar, then passes the lighter back.

KEN lights his.

KEN

You were instrumental in getting transfer payments from the state.

HASSLER

It kept the lights on. Our last congressman was ready to condemn the city.

They puff their cigars.

KEN

There are a lot of homes that are burned out and abandoned. How do we deal with that?

(CONTINUED)

HASSLER

We need to remove ruins. Demolish the eyesores.

They puff their cigars.

HASSLER (CONT'D)

We can offer empty lots to communities for vegetable gardens. We need to fix up the homes that aren't too far gone.

KEN

Would you say we're on the cusp of that?

They puff their cigars, filling the room with blue air, thicker, and thicker.

HASSLER

It's still a long way off. We're just starting to turn the tide on crime. Slowly. It will be years before we've realized enough savings from the new police force or see money coming from the state to deal with that issue.

KEN

What specifically is the new force doing to turn the tide, as you say.

HASSLER

They're targeting drug dealers and catching imports. We need to reduce the thugs by using appropriate punishment, and we need to support the addicts and to cut off demand.

KEN looks over at the computer.

KEN

More with Mayor Douglas Hassler in a bit. Coming up, expecting an update from WKKL's Aaron Mader. He's on his way to a house fire on Polk Avenue. Stay tuned. The news is coming up after this.

He fires a commercial cart from the clunky computer.

EXT. POLK AVENUE - NIGHT

AARON heads towards three people on the sidewalk across the street.

AARON
Hey folks, did you see anything?

They shrug and shake their heads.

AARON pulls his phone back out of his pocket. It's 9:24pm.

He heads towards the WKKL cruiser, but stops outside the house next to the empty lot. An elderly black lady stands on the stoop with her daughter and granddaughter.

AARON
Hi folks, did you see anything tonight?

ELDERLY LADY
I saw a man running towards the home.

DAUGHTER
No!

The ELDERLY LADY turns to face her daughter.

DAUGHTER (CONT'D)
There was a woman and two kids running from the house.

The ELDERLY LADY looks surprised.

ELDERLY LADY
There was?!

DAUGHTER
Yeah, mom, I don't know what you're talking about.

AARON looks around.

AARON
You saw the woman from next door running from the house with her children?

DAUGHTER
Yeah, it was the woman who lives there on the left side.

(CONTINUED)

AARON
Did you see the husband?

DAUGHTER
No.

AARON
Did you see anything else?

DAUGHTER
No.

AARON
Do you know the people who live
there? What are they like?

DAUGHTER
Never spoke to them, but they
seemed like a happy family. Mom,
Dad, both in their 30's. They have
two young boys.

AARON
Did you see where they went.

DAUGHTER
No.

AARON
OK, thank you.

He continues on to the WKKL newscruiser and jumps in,
sliding his bags off his shoulder.

INT. WKKL TALK STUDIO - NIGHT

KEN sits at the head seat of the round talk studio table.

He hits a button on the switchboard.

KEN
Aaron- what's going on?

He nods a few times.

KEN
Mhmm. Mhmm. So, how am I introing
you?

He scribbles down some words on a paper pad.

(CONTINUED)

KEN

Hmm... sounds like a good story.
Any other outlets there, yet?

He pauses for a short while.

KEN

No, we're not in delay.

He pauses.

KEN

OK, stand-by. We're coming up right
away.

He hits a button on the switchboard, then puts his
headphones back on.

INT. WKKL NEWSCRUISER - NIGHT

AARON sits back in the driver's seat, WKKL playing in the
background.

KEN starts to read his news intro when AARON turns the
volume off.

He clears his throat.

AARON

Ken- A sad story out of Biedeman
where a two-unit duplex is on fire.
It appears the left side of the
building is engulfed in flames. I
spoke to the woman who owns the
building and lives on the right.
She was being treated for minor
smoke inhalation in the back of an
ambulance. She tells WKKL she
rented the unit to a young family
with two toddler boys. She believes
they may have been out for a walk.
It doesn't appear they're here at
the scene, but we're following it
for all the latest updates.
Reporting live from Polk Avenue,
Aaron Mader, WKKL News.

He hangs up his phone, grabs his bags, and yanks them as he
jumps out of the car.

EXT. POLK AVENUE - NIGHT

At the home, it looks like the firefighters are getting ahead of the blaze, but flames still ravage from the left second floor window.

He stands, watching the blaze for a moment, when he hears:

CARMEN DIME

Aaron!

He snaps toward the WKKL newscruiser, where a B-TV News van is parked beside it.

CARMEN, the reporter, and her CAMERAMAN are walking towards him. The CAMERAMAN wears a big ENG camera on his shoulder.

AARON

Hey, Carmen.

CARMEN

What's going on? What do you know?

The CAMERAMAN puts the camera on the ground.

AARON

Did you catch my live hit?

CARMEN

Yeah.

AARON

That's what I know.

The CAMERAMAN sets up the tripod, then snaps the ENG camera on it.

He focuses his shot.

CARMEN

So, no word yet on the family? We don't know who or where they are?

AARON

Nope. No idea.

He pulls his cigarette pack out of his shoulder bag, removes a cigarette, puts it between his lips, and sparks it.

CARMEN

How are you? What's new?

(CONTINUED)

AARON
I'm tired and cranky today.

CARMEN
Why? Couldn't sleep?

AARON
The asshole below me blared his
music all day.

He takes a deep puff.

CARMEN
Did you call your landlord or the
cops?

AARON
No. What are they going to do? It's
perfectly legal to make all the
noise you want between nine A-M and
11 P-M.

She reaches for the cigarette. He hands it to her.

She takes a drag, then hands the smoke back and puts her
hand on his shoulder.

CARMEN
So, you just laid in bed wide
awake? Too bad I couldn't have been
there to help...

He brushes her hand off of him.

AARON
Carmen- I have a girlfriend. We
live together.

She looks slightly annoyed or determined.

AARON (CONT'D)
You would've been in her bed.

He puffs his cigarette down almost to the filter.

CARMEN
I'm just being playful. Am I making
you uncomfortable?

AARON
Given our history... Yes.

He snuffs it out.

CARMEN

Well, how am I supposed to feel?
You dumped me and moved half way
across the country. Then you come
back and all of a sudden you're in
this serious relationship with some
bitch who changes senior's diapers.

She pulls out her own pack of 100-mm cigarettes and sparks one.

CARMEN

We're both reporters.

AARON

Kendra's a nurse and she moved here
with me from Cheyenne.

She exhales somewhat in his face.

CARMEN

Yeah, it must be true love if she'd
move to this shithole with you.

AARON

We'd starve to death on two
reporter's salaries.

CARMEN's CAMERAMAN looks uncomfortable.

CARMEN

You could've called me when you got
back to town instead of just
running into me a month later when
you turned up at a homicide I was
covering.

AARON

I'm sorry, but I thought you moved
on. You didn't come with me, and we
never stayed in touch.

CARMEN

Whatever.

She takes a deep drag.

The CAMERAMAN clears his throat.

CAMERAMAN

Alright, Carmen. We're doing live
hits at 10 and 10-20, then we're
out of here.

(CONTINUED)

CARMEN looks at her watch, then turns to AARON.

CARMEN
Have you spoken to the fire chief
yet?

AARON
No. I haven't seen him.

CARMEN looks at the firefighters standing on the roof of the front porch, dousing the house in water.

CARMEN
Let's round him up for a scrum
right away.

She snuffs out the cigarette.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
In the meantime, I'm going to find
out what's actually going on here.

She shoots AARON a dirty look, then walks towards the ambulance.

Once she's gone, AARON and the CAMERAMAN look at each other.

CAMERAMAN
I didn't know you dated.

AARON
We fooled around a bit in
journalism school.

CAMERAMAN
Seems like it meant more to her.

AARON
You know how she can be.

He lights another cigarette.

AARON (CONT'D)
Besides, she wouldn't come with me
to Wyoming.

He gestures his cigarette pack towards the CAMERAMAN.

AARON (CONT'D)
Smoke?

The CAMERAMAN extends his hand, palm down, towards AARON and waves it.

(CONTINUED)

CAMERAMAN

No, thanks.

AARON puts the pack back in his shoulder bag.

AARON

What's it like working with her?

CAMERAMAN

It can be tense at times.

AARON

She manages to wind you up?

CAMERAMAN

She needs you to feel how stressed she is.

AARON looks around.

AARON

She over thinks everything. It makes her a good journalist, and a good storyteller, but it complicates everything she's involved in.

The CAMERAMAN lifts his brows and does an about face.

AARON keeps looking around and spots the fire chief talking to a woman behind the wheel of a car.

The woman looks distraught.

The car isn't running and two boys sit in the back seat.

He immediately assumes it's the WIFE and kids.

The fire chief talks into his radio, then leaves the vehicle.

AARON looks around, then at the CAMERAMAN.

AARON

One sec.

He approaches the car's driver door.

AARON

Mam, are you OK?

WIFE
Leave me alone, you vulture.

AARON
I just want to know if you're OK.

She puts her forehead on the steering wheel.

AARON
Are you OK?

She looks up from the steering wheel, lifting her head.
Tears start to run down her face.

WIFE
You fucking vulture! I said beat
it!

AARON
I'm so sorry this is happening to
you.

She cries some more, facing straight ahead, eyes clenched
closed.

AARON
Please, I hope you're OK.

WIFE
Why do you assholes feed on pain?
Leave me the fuck alone.

She rolls the window up.

AARON backs away from the car and heads back to the
CAMERAMAN.

CARMEN stands with him.

AARON
Just spoke to the wife, sort of.

CARMEN
And? What did she say.

AARON
Called me a vulture. Told me to
beat it.

CARMEN
(angrily)
What did you say?

AARON

I asked her if she was alright.

She taps her foot angrily.

CARMEN

When is the fucking fire chief
going to talk to us?

AARON looks at the house. The flames are starting to look
somewhat extinguished.

AARON

They're gaining the upper hand. It
won't be long.

CARMEN looks at the house.

CARMEN

So, she was angry?

AARON

She was upset. I'd say devastated.

CARMEN

Was she crying?

AARON

Yeah.

Police sirens sound in the distance.

CARMEN and AARON perk up and look in the same direction.

CARMEN

Cops! Distraught wife, no husband
in sight. This is going to be good.

CAMERAMAN

We're coming up to the 10 o'clock.
You ready?

CARMEN

You bet. Make sure to get some
b-roll of the wife after.

AARON looks at his phone. 9:56pm.

He unlocks it and opens a text message with KENDRA.

AARON (TEXT)

Love you, babe.

Nothing comes in after a short moment.

He locks his phone, keeping it in his hand, and walks towards the WKKL news cruiser.

INT. WKKL NEWS CRUISER - NIGHT

AARON jumps in the news cruiser, throwing his bags on the passenger seat.

He dials the talk studio.

AARON

Hey, we've got cops arriving on scene and a distraught wife with two kids in a car. No husband around.

He pulls his notebook out of his bag, along with a pencil.

AARON

Intro me with something like "A family torn apart by fire. We now go live to WKKL's Aaron Mader for the latest at a duplex fire in Biedeman.

He scribbles down some notes.

AARON (CONT'D)

Mhmm... Mhmm. OK.

He waits for a moment.

AARON

Ken- I'm outside a fire in two-unit duplex on Polk Avenue. The left side unit is badly charred. The owner, who lived next door, and neighbours telling me a young family with two boys lived there. Outside, a distraught woman and two boys surveying the fire from a car. The fire chief has yet to speak to media. Police officers are arriving on scene. Reporting live from Biedeman, Aaron Mader, WKKL News.

He hangs up the phone and slides it back in his pocket.

He grabs his bags, yanking them across the seats as he gets out of the cruiser.

EXT. POLK AVENUE - NIGHT

AARON walks back up towards CARMEN and her CAMERAMAN.

AARON
How was your live hit?

CARMEN
Excellent! Yours?

AARON
Pretty good.

They both each spark another cigarette.

CARMEN
What do you think's going on?

AARON
I have no clue. It's weird the
husband isn't here.

Two police cruisers pull in and shut off their sirens.

Two officers from each cruiser exit the vehicle and head
towards the FIRE CHIEF.

He stands with them for a moment, chatting.

AARON looks back towards the WIFE in the car. He switches to
a zoom lens, then snaps a dozen pictures of her and the
boys.

The FIRE CHIEF finishes chatting and walks towards AARON,
CARMEN, and her CAMERAMAN.

FIRE CHIEF
Good evening, folks.

AARON
Hi, sir.

The FIRE CHIEF half smiles.

FIRE CHIEF
I suppose you're looking for a
statement.

CARMEN
Yes.

She turns to her CAMERAMAN.

(CONTINUED)

CARMEN (CONT'D)
Are you ready to record?

FIRE CHIEF
Miss-

He puts his hand out to stop her.

FIRE CHIEF
At this point it looks like the fire was deliberately set. We've managed to extinguish the flames but the structure is still smouldering. Unfortunately, it appears the husband hanged himself in the bedroom closet. Due to the nature of this being a suicide, we hope you will not report it.

CARMEN
Fuck!

AARON slides his phone out of his pocket. He has a text message from KENDRA.

KENDRA (TEXT)
Hey babe, hope you're having a good night. What's going on with the fire?

They text message each other quickly.

AARON (TEXT)
Just found out the husband killed himself. Have to stop covering it.

KENDRA (TEXT)
That's horrible. That poor family.

AARON (TEXT)
Have a good night, babe. I'll see you in the morning.

KENDRA (TEXT)
Love you.

He dials the WKKL talk studio.

INT. WKKL TALK STUDIO - NIGHT

KEN hits a button on the switchboard, playing AARON's voice throughout the room.

KEN
Aaron, what's happening?

AARON (O.C.)
Just got a statement from the fire chief.

KEN
And?

AARON (O.C.)
Looks like the husband hanged himself in the master bedroom.

KEN
Shit.

AARON (O.C.)
Can you pull our voicers and scripts?

KEN reaches for a half-burnt cigar in the ashtray behind the soundboard.

He sparks it and takes a puff.

KEN
Of course.

AARON (O.C.)
I'll put it from our website. Do you want me to head back?

KEN
Up to you. Not much going on here.

AARON (O.C.)
Maybe I'll drive around for a bit and stop for a bite.

KEN
Sounds good, Mader. I'll call if I hear anything.

He hits a button on the switchboard and sits back.

He continues to puff his cigar.

EXT. POLK AVENUE - NIGHT

AARON hangs up his phone and holds it in his hand.

CARMEN and her CAMERAMAN strike their setup and start carrying equipment back to the news van.

AARON watches as the police officers approach the WIFE and her kids in the car.

Two open the driver's door, and help her out. Her body seems limp.

The other two officers help each of the boys.

He slides the phone in his pocket and starts walking towards the newscruiser.

CARMEN comes around the B-TV News van.

CARMEN
Where are you off to?

AARON
Looking for a story.

CARMEN
I can send my cameraman back to the station. Want to grab a drink?

AARON
I don't think that's a good idea.

CARMEN
Oh, Aaron Mader, the sober, responsible one. Since when?

AARON pops the driver door open.

AARON
I just don't think it's a good idea after our talk earlier.

He slides into the newscruiser and starts the engine.

The sound of WKKL spills muffled from the car.

CARMEN jumps in the B-TV News van, pure anger upon her face.

AARON pulls away from the scene.

EXT. AARON'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

AARON pulls up outside his apartment building in the loading zone.

He jumps out of the car, arms it with the FOB, and enters the building through the front door.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

KENDRA lays in bed.

The front door of the apartment unlocks, opens, and closes.

She turns over to face the door as AARON walks in.

KENDRA
Hey, babe. What are you doing here?

AARON
I want to kiss you good night.

He looks at the alarm clock on the night table. 11:32pm.

AARON (CONT'D)
How long have you been in bed?

KENDRA
Just crawled in.

He pulls the blankets up and tucks them around her.

He kisses her neck, then behind her ear.

He wraps his arm around her torso and leans in. He kisses her cheek, then she turns and they kiss on the lips.

AARON
Good night, babe. Love you.

She moans a little bit.

KENDRA
(whispers)
Love you, babe.

AARON
Have a good sleep.

She rolls forward a bit and falls asleep almost immediately.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

AARON quickly rolls a couple of joints. He walks into the kitchen to grab a snack to go, then slips out of the apartment.

EXT. AARON'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

He exits the apartment building and slips back into the WKKL newscruiser.

He starts the engine and drives away.

INT. WKKL NEWSCRUISER - NIGHT

AARON drives through the broken city of Camden.

Flashes of sickly orange cut across his face as he passes under the street lights.

He listens to WKKL as he passes 24-hour fast food joints lit up with neon and boarded up ruins.

He pulls up on S Delaware Avenue, down by the piers, the railyards, and the Delaware River.

He parks the car facing south, beside some trees, and kills the engine.

He opens his cigarette pack and slides out one of the joints. He sparks it and puffs.

After AARON smokes the joint for a moment, slow moving headlights approach. He holds the joint low, below the window line.

A police cruiser slowly rides by. The cop in the passenger seat is turned, facing him as they go by AARON's vehicle wrapped in WKKL branding.

AARON lifts his empty hand in a half wave.

The police cruiser continues on and heads east on Clinton Street.

He finishes the joint and cracks the window open an inch.

He flicks the roach out the window, then sparks a cigarette from his pack.

He puffs it a couple times, when his phone rings.

(CONTINUED)

He answers it.

AARON

Hello?

KEN (O.C.)

Hey, what's going on?

AARON

Not much. You have something for me?

KEN (O.C.)

No. The scanner's quiet.

AARON

I'm just driving around. I'm on Delaware by Clinton.

KEN (O.C.)

Sounds like a plan. Just checking in. Stay safe out there.

AARON

(sarcastically)

Well, schucks, Ken. Thanks!

He hangs up the phone, starts the engine, and sits up.

He pulls away and continues driving through the ruins.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

A shadowy figure, a woman with long hair, stands in the shadows by the door to AARON and KENDRA's room.

It stands there for a moment, watching. It seems to be holding something.

KENDRA sleeps in the queen-sized bed, facing towards the camera. The figure looms above and behind.

The shadow moves across the room, slowly, towards the dresser.

She opens several drawers, fingering through the items.

KENDRA stirs slightly.

The shadow glides towards KENDRA.

It stands overtop of her, but we still can't see the woman's face or distinguishing features. It looms momentarily.

(CONTINUED)

KENDRA stirs some more.

It looks like the item the female figure is holding is a bouquet of flowers.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A moment later, the figure sweeps gently into the living room from the bedroom.

It moves slowly, no bouquet, eyeing the pictures on the wall.

She picks up a picture off the wall of AARON and KENDRA holding each other, and tucks it between her left side.

She moves across the living room.

As she passes a planter, she sticks her finger in the pot to check the soil.

The figure stops at the living room window, silhouetted by street lights and moon light.

She looks out at the city and down towards the ground.

It turns around and moves back across the living room.

She bumps the coffee table and knocks over AARON's bong.

It shatters on the table's granite top.

The figure stops dead cold.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

KENDRA wakes up suddenly.

She hears a creak in the other room, and turns over, half sitting up.

She notices some light cutting down the hallway by her bedroom.

KENDRA

Aaron?

She hears sudden, quickly-paced footsteps move towards the front door.

(CONTINUED)

KENDRA

Aaron?

She turns on the lamp on her night table, and sits up all the way.

The bed is covered in red rose pedals, surrounding her.

She looks confused, but slightly smirks.

KENDRA

Aaron?

KENDRA stands up, slipping a house coat on, and moves slowly towards the hallway.

She steps out of the bedroom, into the hallway.

She flicks the light on, illuminating the hallway and living room.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Once in the living room, KENDRA notices the shards of glass across the coffee table.

After a moment, she then notices the picture missing off the wall.

She looks over at the front door, wide open. The lock looks somewhat busted.

She moves towards it, cautiously.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

KENDRA's head peers out the front door of the apartment.

She looks both ways down the hallway.

Empty.

She moves her whole body out of the apartment, so she's standing in the hallway.

She looks around again, confused.

She goes back inside and shuts the battered door.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

KENDRA walks back into the bedroom, towards the night table, and picks up her phone.

She unlocks it, and opens her messages.

She texts AARON.

KENDRA (TEXT)
*Please tell me you were just
here...*

She sits on the rose pedal-covered bed, waiting a moment.

AARON (TEXT)
No, I'm driving around... Why?

KENDRA (TEXT)
You're not kidding me?

Her phone rings. AARON is calling.

She answers it.

KENDRA
Hello?

AARON (O.C.)
What are you talking about?

KENDRA
The door looks busted, your bong is shattered, there's a picture missing, and someone covered the bed in rose pedals...

AARON (O.C.)
What?!

KENDRA
I thought it was you. Someone was in here.

AARON (O.C.)
Do you think it was one of my listeners?

KENDRA
I don't know... They surrounded *me* in rose pedals.

She looks around the room, somewhat terrified.

Her eyes water slightly.

INT. WKKL NEWS CRUISER - NIGHT

AARON is driving towards the skyline, the phone tucked between his shoulder and cheek.

AARON

I'm on way home home. Call the
police, then call me right back.
OK?

He drives on.

FADE TO BLACK