

Box Canyon
by
Mark Laing

(Based on a true story)

Mark Laing
Los Angeles, CA
mark@marklaing.com
(310) 968-4970

FADE IN:

TEXT OVER BLACK:

In 1959 there was a partial meltdown of the SRE (Sodium Reactor Experiment) at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, the nation's first electricity-producing nuclear reactor in the West San Fernando Valley.

Every two seconds the reactor's heat output doubled. It is estimated the leakage was more than 400 times worse than the accident at Three Mile Island.

At the time this was not officially referred to as a nuclear meltdown. It was called an 'excursion'.

The following is based on a true story.

EXT. OUTSIDE LAS VEGAS - NEVADA - DAY

Grainy 16mm publicity black and white movies show a LEGGY BLONDE parading in an Atomic Mushroom swimsuit made of cotton wool balls in front of an unfurling atomic mushroom cloud.

Equally grainy but color 16mm film plays as a POLICE EXHIBITION PISTOL TEAM blithely shoots targets and chalk sticks out of each other's hands and teeth. It is a dazzling display of marksmanship - and bravado.

EXT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LAB - "THE POND" - SIMI VALLEY - DAY

Santa Susana Field Lab TECHNICIANS, 40s, at the "Pond" casually take turns with a .22 rifle shooting holes into 55-gallon drums. The barrels explode into the sky.

SUPER: AUGUST 1959 - WEST SAN FERNANDO VALLEY, LOS ANGELES

INT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY (SSFL) - AREA IV - NIGHT

It's a hot night and the STAFF are up late, sweating over the heat and the reactor. Beads of moisture roll down several foreheads in unison. A nervous LAUGH as two drops of sweat hit the control table at the same time.

EXT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - SIMI HILLS - NIGHT

BOB DALE, 20s, stiff and bird-like, looking with his upright bob of Brylcreem-wet 50s hair like a nervous woodpecker, arrives for the graveyard shift.

He immediately notices the men in suits, and senses something is wrong.

But the steady presence of supervisor TED ARMSTRONG, 50s, taciturn and unflappable, calms Dale momentarily. Armstrong sports a permanent hand-rolled cigarette in his mouth.

ARMSTRONG

Status report. If you please.

A thin, phlegmatic TECHNICIAN, 40s, wanders over with a clipboard.

TECHNICIAN

Automatic SCRAM system's not functioning.

Armstrong give him a blank look and Dale looks bewildered.

TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)

Emergency shutdown of a nuclear reactor by terminating the fission reaction. As in let's "Scram!"

The levity is lost on Armstrong.

DALE

Thanks. I'm Bob. "The kid."

TECHNICIAN

Yeah, the new kid. Fine time to be joining us.

ARMSTRONG

Manual SCRAM please.

The manual SCRAM seems to work. But then the reactor starts overheating again. Something's wrong.

ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)

Try it again.

TECHNICIAN

The decay holding tanks are full from trying to shut down the reactor.

The gauges keep rising as the reactor gets hotter.

The only option left to stop the reactor from going critical is to open the decay holding tanks bypass valve and release the radioactive gas out of the reactor core into the atmosphere to shut the reactor down.

ARMSTRONG

The reactor is experiencing an excursion.

TECHNICIAN

It's getting hotter. If we open the decay holding tanks bypass valve and release all the radioactive gas from the core, it will shut the reactor down.

There is no typical large concrete containment dome at the SRE which in the event of an accident would contain the radioactive gas.

ARMSTRONG

And cover the valley in radioactive gas!

TECHNICIAN

It's your call.

ARMSTRONG

No, it's going to be Dr. Hox's call.

The reactor is moments away from going critical. Panic sets in. Then...BOOM!

Everyone jumps, thinking the reactor has exploded. But it's a nearby rocket engine test suddenly BLASTING away, lighting up the whole SSFL.

EXT. SSFL ROCKETDYNE TESTING - AREA II - COCA TEST AREA

Also being tested at the Santa Susana Field Lab site are the precursors to the Saturn moon rockets. A tethered Saturn 1B rocket engine ROARS again, lighting up the sky and shaking the lab walls.

The technicians allow themselves a brief nervous smile of relief.

INT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - SIMI HILLS - NIGHT

The control room of the Sodium Reactor Experiment is agog with activity.

ARMSTRONG

Which way is the wind blowing?

DALE

East northeast towards Los Angeles
and Simi Valley.

ARMSTRONG

OK, good.

DALE

Mr. Armstrong, it's...

Armstrong is trying to prevent the workers from panicking but his hands are shaking as he tries to roll a cigarette.

ARMSTRONG

...It's just an excursion,
overheating. Don't panic.

The alarm BELLS are starting to go crazy now and the SRE is heating up again, glowing.

More MEN come into the room including DR. MARTIN HOX, 50s, tall, urbane, and in charge of the SRE reactor, and OTHER TECHNICIANS, 40s.

Hox may be dripping in the heat but he's as cool as a cucumber. Hox twiddles his unlit pipe around and around, never losing tobacco, and seemingly completely unfazed.

But the TECHNICIANS seem frozen in terror, unable to react.

The sweat drips down Hox's brow. Hox notices sweat pouring down Dale's face then looks up at his own nose and realizes drops are dripping off his own.

The clear bubble of sweat judders with the reflected image of the men, frozen as the reactor RUMBLES AND SHAKES.

ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)

Excursion.

HOX

The Sodium Reactor is overheating.
Release the gas from the reactor
core. Now.

ARMSTRONG

Are you crazy, Martin? My family
lives in the Valley.

HOX

Mine too. Open the decay holding tanks' bypass valve.

The reactor temperature rises, moments away from exploding. Alarm bells are screaming now with bells BUZZING like a million giant hornets disturbed in their nest. The technicians look ready to crack.

Hox trips a switch to open the decay holding tanks' bypass valve and release all the radioactive gas from the reactor core into the atmosphere to shut the reactor down. The whole place shakes and groans. It sounds like the end of the world.

INT. REACTOR CORE ROOM - AREA IV - SSFL

Inside the core unit, the huge 17-ton steel cap lifts and moves a couple of feet.

INT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - CONTINUOUS

The reactor finally seems to calm down and the temperature gauges drop. Bob Dale looks accusingly at Hox.

HOX

Get some tape and seal this place up. Get it cleaned and restarted.

At the word 'restarted' everyone in the control room stops momentarily and then continues their work.

Dale gives Hox an imploring look.

HOX (CONT'D)

Get on with it. I'll hold on to this.

Hox grabs Dale's dosimeter (radiation badge) and pockets it.

TECHNICIAN

Can we tell our wives and families what happened?

HOX

All of you listen up. Not a word to anyone. Not a word! We will let the public know what happened in due course.

Dale tapes up the cracks around the large double doors that lead into the high bay area where the reactor is housed.

This keeps radioactive contamination from leaking into the control room.

He runs the thick tape around the cracks and seals the door, his hands shaking.

EXT. HIGH ABOVE THE WEST SAN FERNANDO VALLEY - NIGHT

The dry, sprawling suburbia of the western San Fernando Valley goes hazy as jets of radioactive gas float eastwards.

EXT. HIGH - FAR HIGHER INTO THE JET-STREAM - CONTINUOUS

In the Jet-stream, 35,000 feet up, the radioactive plumes can be seen traveling east and following the path of the winds.

EXT. CHATSWORTH - SLEEPY SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

MELISSA and CHAD BUMSTEAD, are watching Gunsmoke. It's late so their SON, 9, and DAUGHTER, 11 are asleep on the couch.

Invisible gases, laced with radioactive particles, creep down the chimney and through the open screen windows percolating through the living room like some unseen specter.

The radioactive dust finds its way into their daughter's nose, who coughs briefly, causing Melissa to turn. Content her daughter's OK, she returns to watching Gunsmoke.

EXT. INDIANA CORN FIELD - NIGHT

A BEE stops momentarily to gather some pollen for its larvae on the self-pollinating corn stalks.

Up high above, the jet stream delivers radioactive particles which fall onto our bee and the corn husks, seemingly glowing in the dark. The bee seems to notice, shakes itself, and moves on to the next stalk.

INT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Hox and Armstrong watch the angry sodium reactor. It seems to be calming down.

HOX
God help us.

ARMSTRONG

"God helps those"...It's going to be a long night gentlemen.

DAVID TRINITY, 50s, unflappable, airtight, impeccably dressed head of the SSFL project, stands in the backlight. Trinity is unfolding a slug of lead, perhaps from a Linotype machine.

It looks like a stick of gum in his delicate, white hands. He plops it distractedly into his mouth but, looking around to make sure no one saw, spits it out quietly.

TRINITY

How much?

ARMSTRONG

About 40 rads.

TRINITY

Clean it up, seal it off, then start it up again. I'll be in my office.

EXT. UNION STATION - LOS ANGELES - LATE NIGHT

Union Railway station is a gorgeous Spanish Colonial Revival and Art Deco building.

LIEUTENANT RICHARD CHARLTON, 40s, tough, handsome, no-nonsense cop is head of the LAPD Intelligence Division nicknamed the "Palace Guard."

It's baking, even at this hour. In slow-mo, we track a drop of sweat which lands on what looks like a cigarette case.

He's fiddling with the cigarette case, opening and closing it but we can't quite tell what it's supposed to be. It's an origami knuckle-duster and Richard wraps his fingers inside.

Richard, with his honest cop's eyes, square jaw, and rugged, well-proportioned frame filling his double-breasted suit, is a man who's irresistible to women.

Richard's eyes light on the legs of an OLDER FEMALE COMMUTER who knows she's being watched, but a smile from Richard elicits a huge grin from the lady with the great gams.

Richard dabs his brow and keeps pawing the case like a talisman, rolling it like a card sharp.

EXT. TRACKSIDE - SANTA FE CHIEF - UNION STATION

The Santa Fe Chief train pulls in to Union Station, smoke bellowing. A NOISY party of gangsters can be heard from a private railroad car. It sounds like a rolling debauch.

INT. SANTA FE CHIEF LOCOMOTIVE - UNION STATION

As we enter the private railway car we now see expensive double-breasted pin-stripe suits, empty bottles of champagne and the residue of a three-day rolling party.

Well-dressed and wealthy organized crime HOODLUMS are enjoying the rail car with champagne cocktails, pouring liquor and stuffing cash into the cleavage of SEVERAL GIRLS.

CARMINE RITIGLIANO, 40s, hard-bitten Mafioso, is hammered. Carmine, with a pencil mustache, is handsome in a roguish way, maybe only 5'9" but built like a running back.

He has the look of a man who's "arrived at just the right spot." At just the right time.

TIGHTER --

An Omega watch slides off a sweaty wrist and plops into some food on the floor.

CARMINE

See I told you this was better than flying, boys. I'm gonna love LA.

EXT. UNION STATION - LOS ANGELES - CONTINUOUS

Richard is accompanied by NORMAN ELDEN, 40s, African American, easy-going - but as hard as nails. Swank in a bright blue double-breasted suit, Norm is chomping on an unlit cigar.

Norm is cracking his knuckles on his baseball mitt-sized hands which are wrapped around a leather cosh.

With them also is MANNY BALBOA, 50s, Latino, epicurean, huge and tough. Manny's wearing an equally well-tailored suit.

Manny is not so much eating a ground beef taco but attacking it like a lion with half-dead prey.

INT. SANTA FE CHIEF LOCOMOTIVE - SEVERAL CARS DOWN - NIGHT

The cops stroll down the aisle like conductors till they find the luxurious private drawing car.

RICHARD
Carmine Ritigliano?

CARMINE
Yeah, what?

RICHARD
Welcome to Los Angeles.

CARMINE
Beat it, frat boy.

One of Carmine's associates, a thin weaselly man, WEEZEL, 40s, unceremoniously dumps a DAME onto her tush. Weezel dabs his nose constantly, a cocaine-formed habit.

WEEZEL
This is a private car. Beat it.

RICHARD
Next train leaves in six hours.
We'd like you on it.

WEEZEL
You got a warrant? Here, have a drink.

Richard starts assembling his knuckle-duster.

WEEZEL (CONT'D)
Get bent. Scram.

Raucous LAUGHTER from the hoodlums.

CARMINE'S POV

Carmine thinks he sees a cigarette case coming to his face but realizes it's a foldable knuckle-duster heading towards his jaw.

Carmine flies backward down the aisle. Manny and Norm make quick work of the other thugs and bang their heads into each other like battering rams before tossing the other goons out of the compartment window.

Fists are flying everywhere, mostly in the direction of the drunken gangsters.

INT. FREIGHT CAR - PLATFORM 14 - LATER

The bodies of the hoods lie piled up inside a freight car. Richard pauses, caught briefly by a better angel as he spots a KITTEN hiding in the dark.

RICHARD

Half dead like this lot. But you're no hoodlum. You're coming with me.

He stuffs the kitten into his pocket where it snuggles in.

MANNY

Madre de Dios, it's the soul of the gangster.

A chill descends on them for a beat.

INT. UNION STATION - WAITING ROOM - LATER

Richard sits contemplatively in the Art Deco waiting room, wiping food from his shoes, seemingly lost in reflection, the violence catching up to him.

In spite of the knuckle-duster Richard's fists are bloody and swollen.

Manny and Norm watch from afar but are too wise to disturb him. Norm finally approaches with a hip flask.

NORM

When are you seeing Doc?

RICHARD

Tomorrow.

Richard takes a swig from the hip flask.

NORM

And you say you took the only photo above the bomb? How did it get lost?

RICHARD

I never saw the film again. The war ended. Everything was put in boxes, sent stateside.

NORM

Well I still think you're a crazy white cop!

They both crack up. Richard shakes off his mood.

INT. MIDDLE AMERICAN HOME - SAN FERNANDO VALLEY - NIGHT

On flickering RCAs and Philcos, the RESIDENTS of the San Fernando Valley watch Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and vice president Richard Nixon tour a Moscow exposition's exhibit of a model American home.

INT. SAN FERNANDO VALLEY HOME - NIGHT

MISS ATOMIC ENERGY, 20s, appears on TV. She's parading in a mushroom-shaped cotton ball swimsuit in front of a distant mushroom cloud. We cut to the news.

Edward R. Murrow's television program "See It Now" runs a story on Moorpark becoming the first city in the nation to use nuclear-generated electricity.

SARDONIC BETTY AND DAVID ARKENSANIAN, 50s, watch TV and read the LA Times. They're your typical middle-class 50s contented, suburban couple. CBS TV center has just opened.

BETTY

According to the Times Murrow boasted that the new CBS Television City complex "could accommodate tens-of-thousands of people in the case of a nuclear explosion...It could serve as a giant fort to withstand gamma rays, heat radiation, and concussion from an atomic blast."

DAVID

Well, that's just dandy Betty. Maybe we can go there after they've blown up the world?

BETTY

Oh, David, shush now.

EXT. SOARING ABOVE THE SSFL - SIMI VALLEY HILLS - DAY

From high above, in Black and White like a buzzard enjoying the thermals, we soar lazily above a natural rocky bowl in Simi Valley and look over the massive 1,600-acre site with rocket testing pads and nuclear reactor facilities.

Gradually the picture turns to color as we zoom in on Area IV - the Sodium Reactor Experiment, a new type of reactor.

EXT. LOS ANGELES DOWNTOWN - FALSE "DAWN" - MORNING

The hands on the LA Times building clock seem to be sweeping super fast but it is merely a shadow illusion as buildings light up like somebody fired off a massive flashbulb.

It could be dawn but the clock says 3:15. The building is, incredibly, brighter on the side farthest away from the light. The false dawn, which lasts 20 seconds, is from a nuclear test at the Nevada Proving Grounds 270 miles away.

A cheeky COYOTE, finding itself in full daylight, darts across the traffic lights by the LA Times on 1st Street.

INT. RICHARD CHARLTON'S HOME - BEDROOM - SILVERLAKE - NIGHT

The sun also seems to rise in Silverlake. Richard's wife VIDA CHARLTON, 30s, sleepily half opens her eyes at the flash of light then hears Richard coming home.

Vida's half black, looks Italian maybe, and for the 1950s could almost "pass". There's a copy of James Michener's "Hawaii" on the bedside table.

She keeps one eye trained on Richard.

Richard sets the kitten down, and drops his Colt Official Police .38 revolver on the bedside table.

He gently places a tiny FP-45 Liberator paratrooper's pistol from an ankle holster into a wooden tray with some change.

Then he sneaks up from the bottom of the bed to kiss her breasts. Vida pretends to sleep.

RICHARD

It's not morning yet.

VIDA

It is too. It was a minute ago.

RICHARD

It was out in the desert.

VIDA

Huh? You missed the left side.

RICHARD

Atomic bomb testing.

VIDA

You always miss the left one.

INT. BATHROOM - RICHARD AND VIDA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Richard's brushing his teeth with tooth powder. Vida, suspicious, checks his shorts while he's not looking.

VIDA
What's wrong?

RICHARD
Same old, same old. We sent some hoods back home, and some to Valhalla.

VIDA
Ooh, well check this out.

Vida sneaks behind a homemade cotton ball atomic cloud. It's all she's wearing and it suits her just fine.

VIDA (CONT'D)
Hello. Don't sleep on me. Whaddya think? The next Miss Atomic Bomb?

RICHARD
Honey, you know they'll never have a colored Miss Atomic.

VIDA
Why the hell not? Ain't I hot enough?

RICHARD
You're atomic hot baby. Show me your legs.

The cotton falls to the floor, followed by Richard's gaze.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Shouldn't you be getting some sleep baby?

She dangles the handcuffs and they roll in the sheets. The room glows red as the Sun starts to rise for real this time.

INT. RICHARD'S HOME - LATER

A screech from the kitchen. Vida has found the cat.

VIDA
It's a damn stray. I thought I was the only pussy you loved, baby?

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Richard grabs the ice tray from the icebox, and paws Vida with handfuls of ice. She starts to melt.

RICHARD
You said it was hot.

VIDA
I said you were hot.

She thrusts some cubes down his boxers and peers in.

VIDA (CONT'D)
See, they told me I shouldn't a
married no white boy.

RICHARD
I'm black underneath.

VIDA
No, you ain't. You's pink.

They roll onto the floor. The cat jumps on her back.

VIDA (CONT'D)
No! Get off kitty! Richard!

INT. RICHARD CHARLTON'S BEDROOM - SILVERLAKE - LATER

The sweat gleams as Vida tosses and turns, unable to sleep.

VIDA
Do you really think it's safe?

RICHARD
What?

VIDA
Them bombs.

RICHARD
Vida, go to sleep honey. The
government wouldn't hurt us. How're
things at RKO?

VIDA
It's great. I got to meet John
Wayne. He's doing looping for The
Conqueror which just wrapped out in
Utah. He gave me this Geiger
counter as a souvenir.

EXT. SAN PEDRO HARBOR - DAWN

SEVERAL DOCK WORKERS, under floodlights, gasp in shock as a crane carrying a barrel slips its ropes and a man's body pops out of a 55-gallon sealed drum. The drum crashes upright, the lids pops off and the top of a man's head is revealed.

EXT. SAN PEDRO HARBORMASTER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The crusty HARBORMASTER, 50s, spits some dip into a paper cup and props a phone on his shoulder.

HARBORMASTER

Yeah, San Pedro harbor. What division? Homicide I guess. Yeah, we got a body. A body in a barrel.

EXT. TITO'S TACO'S - CULVER CITY - EARLY MORNING

The Intelligence Squad hovers outside of a newly-opened Titos' Tacos. The line goes around the corner. As Manny finishes his last taco, money changes hands - the boys have been betting on Manny's appetite and Norm has won.

RICHARD

Better?

MANNY

Better. Quatro. So why we gotta vamos down to the harbor Lieutenant? It ain't in our jurisdiction.

RICHARD

It is.

NORM

"All California peace officers, including members of LAPD, have police powers....."

MANNY

...Anywhere in the state..." I know.

RICHARD

Chief wanted it done. And done quietly.

MANNY

Chief Pitcher? Jefe himself. Must be muy importante.

RICHARD
 Napkin Manuel? It's got something
 to do with a place in the valley
 called Box Canyon.

EXT. SAN PEDRO HARBOR - DAY

Richard and the boys stand over a large 55-gallon barrel near
 the harbor. Norm is scrawling into a notebook.

MANNY
 How'd you find him?

A WORLD-WEARY harbor cop, LAPD COP 2, is scribbling notes.

LAPD COP 2
 The barrel bobbed up, see? It kinda
 popped open. Then we got the call.

The 55-gallon drum has been unsealed and then covered again
 with some cloth. Manny, using a stick, lifts the cloth away
 to reveal the top of a man's head.

NORM
 Gotta be small to fit into a 55-
 gallon drum?

MANNY
 How'd you get a barrel this heavy
 not to sink? It must weigh 30
 pounds on its own.

NORM
 He's folded.

MANNY
 Like a deck of cards.

RICHARD
 Knock it off, guys. Who's in charge
 here?

Sardonic, world-weary, and taciturn LA Coroner, ED WEISS,
 60s, meanders over and takes one of TWO cigarettes out of his
 mouth before wiping his upper lip with menthol vaseline.
 Nothing fazes him, except wise-cracking dumb-ass policemen.

He sticks the greasy cigarettes behind his ears.

WEISS
 They found the barrel floating when
 they did the usual dump. Most of
 them sank.

(MORE)

WEISS (CONT'D)

This one wouldn't stay down. Too much gas. From the look of the outside, I'd say it's been down there...not long.

NORM

Would, would you Ed?

Norm grabs one of Weiss's cigarettes, notices the vaseline - and lights it anyway.

WEISS

Don't bust my nuts Norm.

The cops lift the barrel now and the body slides onto the dock like a fish with a "PLOP".

LAPD COP 2

Sometimes apparently they strafe 'em. 'Floaters' they call them. To make 'em sink. This one they brought in, to sink it again.

NORM

Ed, there's no signs of decay on the body. It looks like he died five minutes ago. Christ almighty he's got no hands.

MANNY

Yeah, the boys here say they dumped this barrel over a month ago. Then it popped to the surface and they found it on the next run.

Richard slides a pencil and handkerchief around the rim.

RICHARD

You say this barrel floated?

MANNY

It's lined with lead, Lieutenant.

WEISS

Don't ask me, boys. I just work here OK? All I can tell you is that he was killed with some sort of spear.

RICHARD

You mean like spearfishing? Ed. Ed? Why is it lined with lead?

WEISS

Yeah, like someone ran him through like Ben Hur. But there's blunt force trauma too. I gotta get him back to the lab. Give you a full report.

RICHARD

What about the hands?

NORM

Fingerprints?

MANNY

That's what I was thinking.

NORM

He's black.

RICHARD

No, he's white. Look at the skin.

NORM

Look at the hair.

Richard's noodling with his knuckle duster now, nervously opening and closing it like a talisman. He strides away to the side to sit in the shade, sweltering in the sun.

EXT. SAN PEDRO HARBOR WAREHOUSE - DAY

Richard finds a water fountain under a large warehouse and splashes his face with water until his shirt is soaked.

EXT. SAN PEDRO HARBOR - CONTINUOUS

Manny and Norm look around for Richard, who saunters over.

Norm and Manny peel back the tarpaulin. Richard seems shaken and gently covers the dead man with the sheet taking what seems like inordinate care over the corpse.

EXT. SAN PEDRO HARBOR - LATER

SEVERAL BURLY TEAMSTERS 40s, sit around grumbling, kicking their feet. CARMELO, 50s, waddles over to the corpse. Carmelo, rotund, balding and sweating profusely, is chewing on a stogie.

RICHARD

I'm Lieutenant Richard Charlton,
LAPD. What's your tale,
nightingale?

CARMELO

The boys are always griping since
we have to share our bunks with the
coloreds.

RICHARD

Why do you need "coloreds" on board
the tugs?

CARMELO

The maintenance guys, from Atomics
International.

MANNY

We're slow, we don't get it, why do
you need these guys?

CARMELO

It's a 24-hour round-trip. These
guys take a small boat off the tug
then roll the drums off the barge.

NORM

Manifest says these crates came
from Atomics International in Santa
Susana.

MANNY

Any of you guys own a speargun?
Officer, search their lockers and
take statements. From everyone.
You, you sir.

An AFRICAN AMERICAN FOREMAN, CHARLES, 50s, reluctantly steps
forward. He's dignified and quietly indignant. Charles
doesn't rock the boat unless forced to step forward.

CHARLES

Sir, my name is Charles Smith. I'm
the foreman here. We ensure the
safe disposal of radioactive waste.

NORM

So you just dump it in the ocean?

CHARLES

Yessir, that is standard procedure.
It's quite safe.

MANNY

Where, in Mary's name?

CHARLES

We dump the radioactive waste in
6,000 feet of water south off Santa
Cruz Island.

Richard pulls back some tarpaulins. Fifty-five-gallon drums
of low-level radioactive waste weep and sweat in the hot sun.

RICHARD

These come from Santa Susana,
Charles?

CHARLES

Yes sir. From Downey and most of
them from Box Canyon.

RICHARD

Box Canyon.

CHARLES

Santa Susana Field Lab. "The Hill".

NORM

Thank you, gentlemen.

The Intelligence Squad cops finish up and dive into the squad
car, seeking relief in the air-conditioning.

EXT. SAN PEDRO HARBOR ENTRY GATE - CONTINUOUS

A mysterious BLACK WOMAN is watching from afar with
binoculars, taking photos with a Kodak camera.

EXT. SAN PEDRO HARBOR ENTRY GATE - MOMENTS LATER

Richard spots her and pulls up near the mystery woman.

Richard can't resist. She's wearing a glamorous veil and
pillbox hat. It's SYDNEY WILLIAMS, 30s.

Sydney is curvaceous, cat-like, and with a glint in her eyes
suggesting malice of forethought

NORM

No, please Lieutenant, it's like
110 degrees.

RICHARD

Follow the lead. I.D., please.
Private eye, registration
Rochester, N.Y. But little legal
jurisdiction in LA. Doing some
fishing ma'am?

SYDNEY

Fishing for men. You find
something?

RICHARD

A body in a barrel.

She looks disturbed, upset, and catches herself chewing on a
glove, before casually removing some leather from her tongue
like a smoker with some cigarette paper.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Just some kid in a barrel. A white
kid.

A huge look of relief comes over her. Richard notices.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Been to a funeral Miss?

SYDNEY

Yes. In a manner.

MANNY

Lieutenant, please we gotta get
moving.

RICHARD

Miss?

SYDNEY

Miss.

RICHARD

My card.

SYDNEY

I've got your back.

RICHARD

You've got my, my back?

It's too late as Norm is bundling Richard, who he thinks is
up to mischief, back into the police Chevy.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Wait one minute ma'am.

SYDNEY

Am I under arrest?

She flutters her fake eyelashes under the veil.

RICHARD

No, but you should be. Some other time.

SYDNEY

Some other place. I'm sure of it.

NORM

Who the hell was that?

RICHARD

Tourist. Ghoul. I've seen them before at crime scenes. They pick up police radios on scanners.

EXT. LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN FILM LAB - LAUREL CANYON - DAY

Like movie-goers at a drive-in who stepped out of their cars, TECHNICIANS in lab coats stand on a white roof at Lookout Mountain, the secret government film lab on Laurel Canyon, watching and filming the far-off glow of an atomic test.

INT. LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN FILM LAB - LATER

FILM TECHNICIANS splice and spool footage from the Yucca Flat atomic test site.

DAVID "DOC" DYNE, 60s, and curmudgeonly, puts out a cigarette and backwashes a stale cup of coffee. Tall, white-haired, and a taker of no shit, he talks all day long.

JOHN AMATO, 50s, so tired of listening to Doc drone on that he sticks cigarette butts in his ears, tries hard to listen.

"DOC" DYNE

We can set up a camera on the tripod here. Save all that time and trouble driving to the desert.

AMATO

Do you ever stop talking Doc?

"DOC" DYNE

Sorry, nope. We must be out of our minds.

As they watch a viewing screen on the editor, paratroopers from the 101st. division wearily advance towards a massive mushroom cloud as the projector rattles away.

AMATO

It's gotta be safe, I mean, the soldiers are walking into the mushroom cloud.

AMATO dumps some film canisters on a rack next to "Doc" and takes a drag of Doc's old cigarette butt.

"DOC" DYNE

Totally safe, I'm sure. Tell that to the citizens of Nagasaki.

AMATO

Japs. Also, we don't have the fun going to Vegas and gambling all our dough. Right?

"DOC" DYNE

And losing it. Do you realize I've got a cold? I thought you'd quit?

AMATO

I did. I quit buying. Not bumming. Are you going to drink that?

"DOC" DYNE

Can you finish this reel for me, John? My old Army Air Force buddy is coming by later.

AMATO

Him again? The crazy one? The Ivy league cop who says he took a photo of The Bomb from overhead?

"DOC" DYNE

Stanford. And yep. It's strange, he claims the image he grabbed was from above.

AMATO

Yeah. Nutso. "Says" he got it right from above. Blah. Good luck Doc. Oh, this gal, some secretary from Kodak called earlier. Something about foggy film?

"DOC" DYNE

Damn, that's right. I got a telegram from Kodak a few days ago.

AMATO

It's in your mailbox with all the other unread letters.

INT. LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN - DOC'S OFFICE - DAY

Richard skims through Hiroshima photos on Doc's desk when he notices some loose prints. Men running towards Atomic explosions, John Wayne with his sons and a Geiger counter.

He accidentally drops a couple of packets so the photos fall onto the floor. There is also a photo pack of an unknown black man and white woman, and one of them in bed together.

RICHARD

Oh, hi Doc, just enjoying your smut collection. Got a stag party coming up?

"DOC" DYNE

Don't Richy. I've had these military types all over me all this morning.

RICHARD

Who wanted these?

"DOC" DYNE

Oh, some muckety-muck. Top secret. I can't talk about it, Richy. Don't wave that badge at me, it's Atomic Energy Commission stuff, way above your pay grade.

RICHARD

I'm LAPD, Doc, this is LA.

"DOC" DYNE

No, it ain't, it's federal property. Sorry, Richy. I'll keep looking for your photo.

RICHARD

Who came? Names?

"DOC" DYNE

Laurel and Hardy? I don't know. Something English. Smith and Jones!

Richard stealthily slips a couple of photos under his jacket.

INT. PARKER CENTER - LAPD HQ - INTELLIGENCE OFFICE -
AFTERNOON

While Richard peruses the photos, Manny and Norm shoot the shit and pour over paperwork, passing things from one pile to the next, ignoring it. Over the top of the booking forms, they give each other a "let's stop paper hanging" look.

INT. FORMOSA CAFE - WEST HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT

The Formosa Cafe, a boozy converted old Red Car across from the Samuel Goldwyn studio on Formosa and Santa Monica, glows red in the dark, burnt by the streetlights.

A MAN, comatose, snores loudly in a booth - it's JOHN WAYNE, 50s. The staff ignores him.

MANNY

Hey, ain't that the Duke?

RICHARD

Leave him be. Looks like he's sleeping one off.

Richard stops for a beat, wanting to interview Wayne before thinking better of it. He's becoming contemplative.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Radium.

NORM

What?

RICHARD

On our watch dials. Radioactive.

The boys enjoy cocktails with cafe boss LILLY TAM, 60s, who's bulging out of a skin-tight red silk cocktail dress. Lilly's a firecracker and treats the cops like unruly sons and is prone to slapping anyone who gets out of line in her cafe.

LILLY

So what's a matter boys? You look like you missed a night out? Lemme buy you a drink. Best one of the day!

NORM

Lemme buy YOU a drink, Lilly.

MANNY

Lilly, Lilly, come here my...

NORM

Silly.

INT. BOOTH AT THE FORMOSA - MUCH LATER

The barman VINCENT YEE, 60s, cheeky, bright, and frail, sets them up. Vincent is thin like a tall Mai Tai himself, white-haired like a Confucian grandfather.

VINCENT

Here boys, on me.

Richard sweeps them all away, the money cascading to the floor.

LILLY

How's that wife of yours doing Richy? She's double hot chocolate. Right? She's your sweetheart.

RICHARD

She's my sweetheart Lilly. Wait a minute, I thought you were my sweetheart! Lilly!

A BLACK WAITRESS, DELERNER, 20s, slides by, gives Richard the eye. Delerner, wearing impractical fishnet stockings, looks like she's modeling for saucy French maid picture cards.

DELERNER

Hi Richy. When you off tonight baby?

RICHARD

Hi Delerner.

DELERNER

Call me later.

LILLY

Don't you be calling nobody!

She thwacks Richard's chops, almost too hard. He sobers up.

LILLY (CONT'D)

You take care of your wife Mr. Farang. Ugly old Caucasian like you don't find beautiful colored girl like that everywhere. Do you? Are you listening Ricky-Rickshaw?

RICHARD

No Mamma san!

LILLY

Now get outta here you cops. I gotta start preparing for breakfast. Take your coffee with you. Come on. You too Manuel. Norm you gotta go! Norm!

NORM

Well, ain't that a bite.

LILLY

C'mon. Now boys, Xiànzài shì nánhái! Vamos.

EXT. FORMOSA CAFE - LOS ANGELES - CONTINUOUS

As Richard steps out into the night he notices the glow of his radium watch dial and looks North West to "The Hill."

Richard sees Delerner in the alley getting smacked around by her husband JACK, AFRICAN AMERICAN, 30s. He's gigantic and mad and completely unimpressed as Richard flips open his knuckle duster for action.

RICHARD

You like beating up on women? Punk.

JACK

Punk? Boy, you like stealing other men's wives, frat boy?

For a moment this stops Richard in his tracks. Then Jack swings wildly but hits Delerner before connecting with Richard's ear which starts to bleed.

Richard jabs with the knuckle-duster and Jack doubles over, then he rabbit punches him viciously to the back of the head.

DELERNER

No, Richy, that's my baby, don't do it!

RICHARD

You're married?

DELERNER

Like you care?

Richard starts to feel like a king-sized shit when he notices Norm and Manny watching nonchalantly from the alley.

NORM

I ain't saying nothing.

Norm hands him a handkerchief for the bloody ear. Richard sits quietly on the pavement. Manny approaches but Norm waves him away as Richard reflects.

NORM (CONT'D)

You gotta be careful with ears.
They won't heal.

INT. LAPD PARKER CENTER - DOWNTOWN - DAY

Richard, dripping with sweat as he hustles along a long corridor, is daubed under the arms with roll-on Ban deodorant by sardonic DORIS, 60s, herself dry as a bone.

With her horn-rimmed glasses held on a chain, Doris is the type of woman who'd be against bra-burning ten years later. Doris can more than handle herself and grabs Richard's ass as she ushers him into the office of -

LAPD CHIEF PETE PITCHER, 60s, driven and ruthless, who sits at a massive desk behind a monstrous map of LA. There are few freeways on the map apart from the Arroyo Seco Parkway leading to Pasadena.

Pitcher plays with his ears when he's concerned and right now the ears are a-twirling.

The Chief places a Police .38 pistol on the desk in front of him. Richard notices this quirk for the umpteenth time.

PITCHER

Young Richy, how's Vida doing?

RICHARD

She's grundy.

PITCHER

Oh Lordy. Still doing the department pistol team?

RICHARD

Yes, sir, I am.

PITCHER

They have a shooting range up at "the Hill."

RICHARD

The "Hill". Box Canyon?

PITCHER

Yes, you know the Santa Susana
Field Lab, near Rocketdyne in
Canoga Park? Go check it out for me
Rich?

Pitcher offers a cigarette to Richard which he declines. He
brings out a bottle of Scotch and a dirty glass, then adds a
little water. Richard takes a slug. Pitcher just nurses his.

RICHARD

An accident Pete?

PITCHER

An incident. Go check it out, will
you? Make sure the whole place
isn't going to blow up Rich.

RICHARD

Righto, sure thing Pete.

PITCHER

Place is run by Atomics
International under the AEC.

RICHARD

AEC?

PITCHER

Atomic Energy Commission. It's full
of military, federal police,
assholes, and nuclear scientists.
Just go have a look. But don't let
them give you the bum's rush. Watch
your ass Rich, these atomic goons
play for keeps. Just follow the
case...

RICHARD

...I know sir, where it leads.

PITCHER

By the way, watcha find at San
Pedro?

RICHARD

Nothing, just some guy got the big
sleep from a speargun. Mob hit
probably.

PITCHER

Lordy, a speargun?

RICHARD

Pete...?

PITCHER

I know, I know, the pistol. I'll
tell you one day.

INT. LOS ANGELES CORONER'S OFFICE - DAY

Weiss, the coroner, is standing over a corpse.

WEISS

What can I tell you, Richy? He fell
off the boat onto something hard.
One of the teamsters shot him with
a speargun. I dunno. I'm getting
too old for this stuff.

NORM

How come all the X-rays are black?

WEISS

You tell me. I was about to call
Kodak. They all came out like that.

NORM

He's remarkably well-preserved doc.
Sealed can?

WEISS

Maybe. There's no formaldehyde
present. It's uncanny.

RICHARD

You're not helping me, Ed. What
about the hands?

WEISS

To get rid of fingerprints.

RICHARD

But we still have dental records.

Weiss drops a wallet on the stainless steel table.

WEISS

Someone dropped this off earlier.

RICHARD

Someone?

Richard rifles the wallet.

WEISS

Someone. I can tell you he was a black man, Rich. He doesn't look it, since he's buzz-cut and all his skin is white now, but he lived his life as a black man. There's no photo I.D. in the wallet.

RICHARD

Norm?

NORM

He was black. Probably had a white daddy. Besides, pecker's too small to be full-blood negro.

They all crack up laughing. But Richard keeps staring at the corpse's face. It reminds him of something, someone. He pulls the sheet up to half cover the face then down again.

NORM (CONT'D)

What is it, Lieutenant?

RICHARD

I dunno. I think he was family. Just a hunch I guess.

WEISS

Huh?

NORM

He thinks Mr. Darryl Legg was homosexual or bi-sexual at least.

WEISS

He was married, or used to be, see the card in his wallet? He also had delicate hands. Tiny hands.

RICHARD

Because of the schlong?

WEISS

You ass Rich. Because of the wrist bones.

Norm cracks up.

NORM

That don't prove nothing Ed. Oh and great police work Lieutenant.

RICHARD

Well, what have you got sergeant?
Did you ever see a regular guy with
such manicured toenails? He must be
"a friend of Mrs. King." "Light in
the loafers," Ed. And there's this.

Richard holds up a card, it reads: 'The Mattachine Society' -
(an early national gay rights organization).

NORM

A club for fruits.

RICHARD

A club for lost souls.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BLVD. - MORNING

Richard's Police Chevrolet pulls up abruptly opposite a movie
theater. 'North by Northwest' is showing, kids are unloading
Herald-Examiner newspapers from a pickup truck.

Manny dives into a toy store and comes out with a Frisbee.

INT. POLICE CHEVY - HOLLYWOOD BLVD. - CONTINUOUS

Manny plays with the disk, tossing it the wrong way up.

MANNY

It's called a Fisbee, it's the
latest thing.

NORM

Frisbee you dufus. It'll never
catch on.

MANNY

It's for my kid.

NORM

Right.

RICHARD

If you two are finished, I need my
donut.

NORM

It's too far Lieutenant.

RICHARD

No, it ain't. Made in the shade.

They peel off down La Brea Avenue, curling on to La Cienega which becomes almost a highway south of Adams. For a blissful moment, all seems well with the Intelligence Squad.

EXT. RANDY'S DONUT SHOP - NEAR LAX - CONTINUOUS

Amidst the endless smog covering the huge tank-like cars on La Cienega we can just make out the red jam from a jelly donut which squirts, drips, and gets everywhere as Richard attacks it with napkins. Manny's reading a Herald Examiner.

MANNY

Hey, guess what, Hawaii just became the 50th state. Me and the Mrs are going there one day for sure.

NORM

What is it with you and jelly donuts, lieutenant?

RICHARD

I thought you were going to ask what is it with me and black girls.

NORM

What is it with you and black girls? (Beat) And jelly donuts?

From the nearby Los Angeles Air Force Base, a B-29 Superfortress swoops out of the marine layer like a silver apparition. By now superseded by the B-52, the Air Force still uses them as weather planes.

Richard stares at the bomber then down into the jelly gushing everywhere. It becomes a cauldron of flames and firebombs exploding on matchstick houses, a red jelly inferno of Hell.

Richard drops the donut like it's a red hot coal and stares off west towards the Air Force base.

INT. COLES BAR - DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Richard is eating a French dip and pouring over the photos he took from Doc at Lookout Mountain. He can't make out faces but it is a black man and white woman. He juxtaposes a snapshot of him and Vida next to the photo and reflects.

RICHARD'S DAYDREAM

In his mind, Richard is once more looking down from a B-29 nacelle but he's now flying over the Santa Susana Field Lab as a cop in 1959, trying to piece together what happened.

INT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - SIMI HILLS - NIGHT

Bob Dale and his crew restart the damaged reactor as instructed. All is well and the technicians high-five each other for a job well done. Richard starts to fade back to his French dip at Coles but a CAR HORN outside Coles...

...becomes an ALARM at the SSFL as another scenario emerges in his daydream.

Dale and crew restart the damaged reactor as instructed but now the radiation levels are so high the gauges are off the scale of measurement. It's near pandemonium.

INT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LAB SRE REACTOR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dale and other TECHNICIANS easily remove the first fuel rods but the closer they get to the damaged fuel elements, the harder they are to remove. They tug to break them free.

While pulling out the last two fuel rods in the reactor - the hottest rod breaks off in the reactor core.

As it comes up inside the fuel element transporter, the OPERATOR sees that it has broken off and panics.

While attempting to stop it he pushes the wrong button and lifts the lead safety protection shield off the reactor face, exposing the high bay area and building to radioactive contamination from the reactor core.

Panicking, the operator runs for it and sounds the alarm for everyone to get out of the building.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SSFL SRE CORE REACTOR ROOM - LATER AT NIGHT

Dale volunteers to lower the lead radiation shield.

INT. CORE REACTOR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dale, wearing little more than a white boiler suit, and sweating profusely, lowers the lead radiation shield.

Close on a radiation meter - it's still off the scale.

EXT. COLES BAR - DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

At Coles in the present, Richard snaps out of his daydream and watches outside as a TV camera crew interviews a man.

We dissolve back to the SSFL as a TV camera at the end of a cable is used by technicians to peer into the fuel element channel at the broken element in the reactor core.

INT. COLES BAR - DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - CONTINUOUS

Richard is playing with his sandwich, trying to pull out bits of beef with a straw, mimicking the struggles at the SRE.

INT. RICHARD'S HOME - SILVERLAKE - LATE AFTERNOON

Vida blows cool air on Richard's face as she tries to stir him. He wakes abruptly, covered in sweat.

VIDA

Richy-Rich you OK? You fell asleep.
Bad dream?

RICHARD

No. Yeah. I was dreaming. But I
didn't dream I took the photo.

VIDA

What's wrong baby?

RICHARD

I want to believe again, in the
dream. I want to vanquish giants,
cyclops, and evil wizards. I wanna
be the guy who flies the plane, not
the guy who flies into the flight
path by accident. I want to be
Klaatu, not Gort. I want to be
Kookie Kookson III...

VIDA

Or Stu Bailey...

RICHARD

Yeah, Professor Sir Oliver
Lindenbrook.

VIDA

The Journey to the Center of the
Earth!

RICHARD

I love you. What time is it?

VIDA

You said you wanted me to wake you.
Had some contact you wanted to meet
at the Formosa.

RICHARD

Thanks, doll.

Richard watches the glowing lights of downtown from the bedroom as Vida dresses him, placing the pistols just so and playfully pulling his shirt straight from inside his fly. As the Sun fades, downtown LA seems to glow radioactively.

VIDA

You come straight home, hear? Don't
be talking to no colored girls
young man.

RICHARD

Yes'm.

INT. FORMOSA CAFE - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Richard nurses a gimlet. In walks a swell-looking dame, JANE LEGG, 20s. She's been poured into a tight rayon crinoline black cocktail dress, but Richard can still make out her legs under the hoop petticoat.

She spots Richard in an instant and sits beside him. He rises like a gentleman.

JANE

Thanks. Look, I'll buy you a drink
OK?

RICHARD

I have a drink.

JANE

Try a Formosa cocktail - a Mai Tai.

Vincent brings a Mai Tai. Richard slugs it back.

RICHARD

Not bad and not bad.

JANE

Thanks but I ain't here to flirt.
That man you found in the barrel.
He was my husband.

(MORE)

JANE (CONT'D)

Well, my ex-husband. We were having marriage troubles but I didn't want him dead. Honest injun mister.

RICHARD

His name?

JANE

Legg, like me. Me Jane, him Darryl. Darryl Legg.

RICHARD

Why was he killed? Your lover kill him?

JANE

No, no sir. I think he was killed at Downey or Box Canyon.

RICHARD

Box Canyon?

JANE

Yeah, The Hill, Box Canyon, you know where they test all those rockets in the West Valley?

RICHARD

I know. You're crazy, he was killed near the ocean by a spear, you know the kind they hunt big fish with?

JANE

You got it all figured out don't you bozo?

RICHARD

I got you figured out.

She crosses her legs and shakes her skirt towards him.

JANE

Now listen Mr. Lieutenant...

RICHARD

...Charlton.

JANE

Lt. Charleston. Somebody at Box Canyon killed Darryl.

RICHARD

Where's the beef? He ain't your problem anymore.

JANE

The beef? The beef is maybe Darryl found out what was going on up there with all that nuclear stuff and they killed him.

RICHARD

How did you find me anyway?

JANE

Mr. Reese, the coroner, called me.

RICHARD

Weiss.

JANE

Whatever.

RICHARD

What did your folks make of your relationship?

JANE

You mean because he was colored?

RICHARD

Yeah.

JANE

Well, we ain't living in Mississippi.

RICHARD

So they were peachy?

JANE

Not peachy but fine.

As Jane passes a photo of her and Darryl at the Brown Derby Richard notices she's sporting an expensive Ladies' Longines Mystery Dial Yellow Gold watch.

JANE (CONT'D)

See, at the Derby. In dress uniform. He served in the Pacific.

RICHARD

A real couple of swells. Nice gams.

JANE

These. Yeah, you a leg man?

RICHARD

Yeah, what's it to you?

JANE

Nothin'. Look mister I gotta go.
I've told you the truth. Darryl was
murdered because of something he
found out at Box Canyon.

RICHARD

Or because he was a friend of
Dorothy.

JANE

I liked Darryl because he was
different.

RICHARD

You didn't mind that he liked men?

JANE

I was OK with it.

RICHARD

Really?

JANE

Yeah, we had it figured out.

She gets up to leave; Richard stands again.

JANE (CONT'D)

It's true what they say about you.

RICHARD

What do they say?

JANE

You're a gentleman - a real ladies'
man. And a louse.

RICHARD

Ladies' men are always louses.

JANE

Don't bother to see me out. I got a
girlfriend waiting on me outside.
See?

RICHARD

Thanks for the tip, Jane.

Richard plays with the photo for a while, trying to piece it
all together. He chugs down his drink. Vincent brings a last
Mai-Tai and the tab.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Thanks, Vincent.

VINCENT
No problem, Mr. Rick. What that lady want?

RICHARD
Redemption, Vincent. Redemption.

Richard leaves the Formosa Cafe via the rear entrance.

EXT. FORMOSA CAFE - ALLEY - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

He stops in the alley, seems to be mulling over Jane, and looks forlornly to where she exited.

PETERS 50s, greasy and sweaty, and LOREY, 60s, sweatier and greasier, but built like a refrigerator and nervously chewing a cigar stub, approach Richard leisurely from the shadows.

Peters slugs Richard like a prizefighter. Richard reaches for his knuckle-duster but Lorey merely bats it away with his giant fist.

It's like being assaulted by moving refrigerators - hit them and they merely clang. Richard's tough but the thugs are huge and make fast work of him, mashing him into a lamppost.

They are about to finish him off when a FLASH gun lights up out of the shadows blinding everyone.

It's Sydney Williams and she's sporting a Kodak BROWNIE STARMATIC replete with flash.

SYDNEY
Freeze.

PETERS
What in hell is that?

SYDNEY
It's the new Kodak Brownie Starmatic.

LOREY
Stupid bitch... Gimme that thing.

And she pops another flash which blinds them again. She double kicks them on the shins then kicks and spikes them in the nuts with her high heels. Amazing. They crumble, almost in unison.

Sydney then beans them with a twirling camera baton. First in the nuts for Lorey then rounded off by a pistol-whipping for Peters. Even Richard winces; there's something vicious about this gal.

RICHARD

You know these things shoot bullets too. I mean they're not just for use as a club.

SYDNEY

I hate the noise; too loud. So I never fire them.

RICHARD

Never.

SYDNEY

Never.

RICHARD

My savior. Eastman Kodak. And..and...a...n...

SYDNEY

A colored girl...

RICHARD

A...

SYDNEY

A negro?

Richard tries to compose himself.

RICHARD

No, just surprised you're so young.

SYDNEY

Sydney Williams, Kodak investigations department.

She waves a badge. Richard, still on the ground, grabs it and takes a closer look.

RICHARD

Are you really five foot seven?

SYDNEY

In my stockinged feet.

RICHARD

And such nice feet too.

The thugs start to stir.

SYDNEY
Your friends are stirring.

RICHARD
That's a pretty neat trick.

SYDNEY
High school cheerleader.

RICHARD
Right. We've met someplace before.

SYDNEY
I think not. Let's scam.

RICHARD
Let's. Oh.

Richard winces and crumples from being kicked in the "pants".

SYDNEY
Let me see.

RICHARD
Nothing to see.

SYDNEY
I'll be the judge. This may be serious. I'm not interested in the franks, just the beans, and my, such lovely beans.

RICHARD
Gently. Let me guess, you've always had a thing for...

SYDNEY
Yep. Now let me concentrate.

RICHARD
Big hands, no, huge hands. They're like ice.

SYDNEY
See. All the better to...

DISSOLVE TO

INT. THE PANTRY - DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Sydney and Richard nurse black coffees and donuts. She nibbles on what look like vitamins. The interracial duo gets some sideways glances from the OTHER WHITE PATRONS.

They are ignored continually by the surly WHITE WAITER. Richard waves his badge, CLAPS loudly and rudely and the waiter thinks better of it and comes over.

The noise makes Sydney suddenly reflective.

RICHARD

Cat got your tongue? Hello dreamy.

Richard snaps his fingers loudly but she grabs them in her huge, strong hands. Richard is startled at her strength.

SYDNEY

Sorry. I was far away. Anyway, I thought you guys all loved donuts.

RICHARD

I love...

SYDNEY

...dark girls.

RICHARD

Black girls.

SYDNEY

Who rescue white boys. And it's true what they say about LA. Nat King Cole's welcoming committee when he moved into Hancock Park?

RICHARD

We have our crosses to bear.

SYDNEY

Yeah, burning crosses.

Richard pulls up from a long schpiel and keeps schtum.

RICHARD

Yes ma'am. So tell me the story, Syd.

SYDNEY

We started losing film in our plants. Fogged, looked like light was leaking in.

(MORE)

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

We couldn't figure it out so they sent me to investigate.

RICHARD

So what'd you find out?

SYDNEY

Unknown.

RICHARD

Unknown?

SYDNEY

Industrial sabotage, faulty manufacturing, some weird substance near the packing boxes.

RICHARD

Something nearby?

SYDNEY

Last January as snow blanketed Rochester...

RICHARD

Kodak's Headquarters...

SYDNEY

Very good Richy-Rich.

RICHARD

Kodak detected spiked radiation levels...

SYDNEY

...which measured 25 times the norm. The corn husks from Indiana we were using as packing materials were contaminated with the radioactive isotope Iodine-131.

RICHARD

So you go to Indiana.

SYDNEY

And find nothing. Think, work with me Richy-Rich.

RICHARD

There's radiation everywhere. Could have come from anything: the Soviets, smokes, TV, natural gas, Radon, plane travel, flying over Japanese cities...

SYDNEY

Very good. Go to the head of the class Lieutenant.

RICHARD

Soil, radionuclides, luminous watches...

SYDNEY

Could've. And I am impressed.

RICHARD

They gave us some background in the Pacific. After the bombs, we were sent as observers.

SYDNEY

And I bet your little eyes were as wide as saucers.

RICHARD

So what's Kodak's interest here? Worried about it getting into the film supply?

SYDNEY

Worried about it getting into the milk supply.

RICHARD

I don't follow. So you're here to find out what happened.

SYDNEY

It's true, you are quick on the uptake. Help me get to the truth of this and I'll help you find the killer.

RICHARD

I don't buy it. Kodak could just call up the Atomic Energy Commission and ask them. Why would they send out a private dick -- no offense...

SYDNEY

...Then the AEC refused to return our calls and then did and said it was all a lie, butterfly.

She balances a meatball on a spoon playing with it on her tongue and slurps.

RICHARD

You're on Sydney. Lead the way.

SYDNEY

Go and see this guy. He's an ex-cop, now working security at RKO. Hell, you probably know him. You cops are as thick as thieves.

RICHARD

Lickety-split.

She hands him a mini-poster for a movie starring John Wayne as Genghis Khan - "The Conqueror." He stops himself from over-reacting and pockets it, feigning nonchalance.

EXT. MANNY'S HOME - PORCH - BOYLE HEIGHTS - EARLY MORNING

Richard and Norm pull up to collect Manny.

Manny's munching on a taco but his wife, NATALIA, 40s, rotund and jolly, spots Richard and Norm and drags them up onto the porch where tamales are steaming. Natalia's the kind of señora who hardly ever takes off her apron.

NATALIA

Señor Richard, you said you loved my tamales at Navidad. And here are some more.

Richard picks her up and hugs her, Norm kisses her hand like a gallant. They grab some tamales in tin foil. GRANDMOTHER BALBOA, 70s, rolls flour tortillas on an outside oven.

RICHARD

Best, lightest flour tortillas in LA. You could open a restaurant, Natalia.

NATALIA

Sure, sure then Manny, mi Gordo, would eat up all the profits.

Manny is stuffing three tortillas into his coat pocket.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

Be safe muchachos. Via con Dios.

A last kiss from Richard and the squad bundles into the Chevy.

MANNY

Where we going?

RICHARD
To the movies.

EXT. RKO RADIO PICTURES STUDIOS - CULVER CITY - DAY

Richard, Manny, and Norm nudge the gate. Badge waving doesn't work with grumpy SECURITY GATE GUARD, BILLY, 70s, until they are approached by jumpy ED MYLES, 60s, and former LAPD.

Myles looks hardly old enough to retire but has the donut-built body of an LAPD pen-pusher who found another cushy retirement job working security at a movie studio.

MYLES
Ricky Rich! What are you bums doing on my lot? C'mon in. Yeah, let 'em in. They're with me. Let them in!

BILLY
As you say, Mr. Myles. Park on lot B.

INT. COMMISSARY - RKO RADIO PICTURES BACKLOT - CONTINUOUS

Richard, Norm, and Manny nurse studio coffee and jelly donuts at the RKO commissary.

RICHARD
Myles, tell me about "The Conqueror" and what happened out in the desert. You were shooting at a nuclear testing site?

MYLES
Not quite.

RICHARD
You brought back some souvenirs.

MYLES
They don't call it "RKO Radioactive" Pictures for nothing.

MANNY
What does that mean?

MYLES
It means, my friend, that the whole damn place lights up like a Christmas Tree when you walk by Sound Stage Two with a Geiger counter.

NORM

How?

RICHARD

They shot the movie downwind from
Yucca Flat, Nevada.

MYLES

Nobody knows about this Rick, how'd
you...?

RICHARD

...Vida. She spilled the beans and
brought home this.

He pops the Geiger counter on the table.

MYLES

How is the Mrs?

NORM

But the Conqueror was wrapped like
what, months ago?

MYLES

Yeah, bright spark, this stuff only
has a half-life of 11,000 years.

MANNY

What's a half-life?

MYLES

It's, if I've got this right, the
rate at which radioactivity dies
off, dissipates.

RICHARD

The time it takes for half of the
atoms of a radioactive material to
disintegrate. Anything from a few
seconds to billions of years.

They all give Richard a "look" as he tears apart a donut.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Got any more jelly? No?

Myles passes around a photo of John Wayne operating a Geiger
counter during filming. Richard lets it rest in his lap and
dreamily looks off into the mountains.

MANNY

How come you know so much about
radiation Ed?

MYLES

How come Rich knows so much? I had a full rundown by some guys from the Atomic Energy Commission when they found out where we were shooting.

NORM

Don't make no waves.

MYLES

So to speak. The movie was shot in the canyonlands in Utah near St. George. As you said, last year, the military tested 11 atomic bombs at Yucca Flat, Nevada. Clouds of fallout floating downwind. A lot of that dust funneled into Snow Canyon, Utah.

RICHARD

Where much of The Conqueror was shot. But we're 400 miles away.

MYLES

The actors and crew were exposed to the stuff for weeks. The cameras, trucks are probably still "hot."

MANNY

Jesus wept.

MYLES

He did. Pedro Armendáriz got cancer of the kidney only four months after the movie was completed. John Wayne, Agnes Moorehead...

RICHARD

They're probably all heavy smokers. Could be coincidence.

MANNY

(Lighting up)
Smoking never hurt anyone.

Norm shows a photo of Darryl Legg.

RICHARD

Ever heard of a wanna-be colored actor, good-looking Sydney Poitier type called Darryl Legg? I think he was on contract here. Maybe an actor, maybe a stagehand.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

He was a stevedore in the Marines during the war.

Myles looks at the photo of Darryl.

MYLES

Good looking kid. Marines, huh?

NORM

Did you ever meet this man, Mr. Myles?

MYLES

I think maybe he was a grip, yeah, or a teamster, I can't remember.

RICHARD

Do me a favor, Ed. Think back.

MYLES

Who is he?

RICHARD

He might be a commie subversive.

MYLES

You're still straight as an arrow. He was a Marine Dicky.

RICHARD

He used to work here. And at Box Canyon atomic lab. Did Darryl blow the whistle? Working for the Russians? Call the Feds? Which was why he had to go work at Atomics International? I need some answers, Ed.

MYLES

I don't know nothing, Richy. He was just a nice colored kid. That's all. I don't know nothing about no bombs. Does this thing even work?

RICHARD

He drove in some of the radioactive soil from Utah, got sick, threatened to blow the whistle on RKO, the studio money men got wind of it, took him for a ride down to San Pedro, shot him with a speargun, dumped him in a barrel...

MYLES

Give it up, Rich.

Myles tries to turn the Geiger counter on, but can't make it work. Richard angrily snatches it away from him, fiddles with it and it starts going bananas. KLAK, KLAK, BRRR!

EXT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - SIMI HILLS - DAY

Richard, Norm, and Manny pull up in their Chevrolet. The security looks daunting. FEDERAL POLICE circle in. Their grizzled, grey jowls betray a toughness and ruthlessness born of entitled authority and casual violence.

FEDERAL COP #1

You gentlemen get lost?

NORM

This is Box Canyon, right? This is the nuclear lab?

FEDERAL COP #1

This is the Santa Susana Field Lab. Federal Property, Rocketdyne, Atomic Energy Commission. No admittance.

RICHARD

We're here for the sharpshooter exhibition. See.

Manny pops open a case with clean-looking shooting pistols.

FEDERAL COP #1

Cops.

NORM

Cops. With guns and badges.

EXT. SHOOTING RANGE - SSFL - DAY

The SSFL shooting range is state of the art. Over a hill, the boys spot some other shooting going on at The Pond.

EXT. THE POND - CONTINUOUS

Bob Dale and some technicians in hard hats stand behind a shield and shoot 55-gallon drums which explode and vaporize.

EXT. SHOOTING RANGE - SSFL - LATER

Richard shoots a police special .38 as Manny tosses targets in the air. The ONLOOKERS and TECHNICIANS erupt.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR, 40s, rigidly strict, and a Martinet approaches. Escobar has a baton under his arm - the type a Field Marshall carries. And he actually carries it off.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR
I heard you got the Thomas McGinley
Trophy at Camp Perry this year.
What are you shooting?

RICHARD
Colt Official Police.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR
Nothing fancier?

RICHARD
And those barrels? You just shoot
them?

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR
You can put your gear right over
here, gentlemen. Iced tea?

Richard, Manny, and Norm show off their stuff in a dazzling display including cigarettes shot out of clenched teeth.

Escobar is smoking a cigarette. Before he can protest, Richard has blown the cigarette in half. He's indignant but puts on a show of being sanguine.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR (CONT'D)
Nice shooting. That's pretty fancy
pistol work sergeant.

RICHARD
Lieutenant.

Norm holds up three pieces of chalk - Richard blows them away. Manny holds a white disk - Richard shoots out the center, then moves it sideways and blows that away.

The watching SCIENTISTS and TECHNICIANS treat Richard's team like demigods. David Trinity appears out of nowhere flanked by TWO AEC SOLDIERS sporting Thomson submachine guns.

TRINITY
Do you always shoot true, Lt.
Charlton?

RICHARD

I aim to, sir.

TRINITY

I wanted to see what all the fuss was about and now I see. Come join me, Lieutenant, up at Hill House.

EXT. SIMI HILLS - TRINITY'S PALATIAL HOUSE - DAY

Trinity flicks cigarette ash onto the floor. The house is gargantuan, solid, and like a cliff-top aerie. It looks like it could withstand a nuclear blast - which it could. Trinity is playing with his 'stick of gum' piece of lead.

TRINITY

May I see your sidearm?

Richard passes over his Police Special .38.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

You're very trusting.

Like quicksilver, Richard has a pistol pointed at Trinity.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

Cute. Airborne?

RICHARD

Paratrooper's pistol.

TRINITY

A .45 ACP Liberator.

Trinity brings out a .45 long automatic bullet.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

Here. This lead was once plutonium Lieutenant. It started out as uranium, then over thousands of years, decayed until it was stable.

RICHARD

And heavy.

TRINITY

Exactly. It's heavy because it is now stable. You like using our pistol range here on "The Hill" don't you? Is that why you were chosen to come here? Or because you flew reconnaissance over Japan during the war?

RICHARD

I saw some men shooting a barrel.

TRINITY

The .45 long won't fit the
Liberator but keep it as a
souvenir. A libation?

Richard pockets the bullet. Trinity pours another Scotch.
Richard notices his Longines Mystery Dial Yellow Gold watch.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

How much are they paying you as a
Lieutenant these days, Lieutenant?

RICHARD

Enough.

TRINITY

Enough to keep your wife in pretty
things.

RICHARD

My wife likes me home in one piece
each night. She wants to be Miss
Atomic Bomb.

TRINITY

But...?

RICHARD

It's closed to colored girls.

TRINITY

America, land of inequality. We
could use a man of your skills here
at the lab.

RICHARD

No, I...

TRINITY

Maybe we can help with that Miss
Atomic contest Lieutenant? Maybe we
can take her out to watch some
bombs explode?

Raul smirks.

Richard notices a photo on the bookshelf of Trinity with John
Wayne and Pedro Armendáriz. Another with Hayward Hough
(Howard Hughes) the reclusive billionaire.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

John Wayne, we lent them some equipment since they were concerned about radioactivity in the Utah desert.

RICHARD

Geiger counters.

TRINITY

Rad counters, dosimeters, monitoring badges.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR

We know all about you, Lieutenant. All about you. You flew photo-reconnaissance in the Pacific.

RICHARD

Then know this. That we're investigating a dead body found in barrels which originated at this facility.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR

We call it "The Hill".

RICHARD

I'd like your full cooperation. The barrels are assembled at your facility here at Box Canyon.

TRINITY

Here and in Downey.

RICHARD

Ever see this man before, Mr. Director? I believe he worked at this facility at one time and at RKO as well.

Trinity isn't giving anything away but seems to soften, not wanting to play his hand.

TRINITY

Murdered you say?

RICHARD

I didn't. I said dead. All curled up in a barrel.

TRINITY

They brought Admiral Nelson's body back from the battle of Trafalgar in a barrel. In a barrel of rum to preserve it.

RICHARD

That so?

TRINITY

Nelson was shot by a French sharpshooter. The ship's surgeon checked every few days and pronounced himself pleased with the preservation of England's most famous corpse. You and I aren't all that different.

RICHARD

We're different and I don't want to end up in a barrel.

TRINITY

Like Nelson?

RICHARD

I warrant.

A SERVANT, 70s, URBANE, enters with Pewter tumblers. His hands are shaking so much Richard wonders whether the grog will make it to him.

TRINITY

Some Brandy, Lieutenant? You know, the Victory was so battle-scarred when it returned to Portsmouth it was all but useless for battle afterward.

Richard takes a tumbler, sips it. Raul turns away.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

Indeed. Raul has a history with alcohol, don't you Raul?

RICHARD

Director, I'm more concerned with the present. With people dying in my jurisdiction.

TRINITY

People die all the time. A great many died in Japan when we dropped the atomic bombs.

(MORE)

TRINITY (CONT'D)

And why'd you drop one on Nagasaki?
Weren't they finished?

Richard searches for an answer.

RICHARD

They weren't finished.

TRINITY

So you dropped the bomb.

RICHARD

I took the photos.

TRINITY

So, hundreds of thousands died to
save the lives of millions.

RICHARD

Is that why Darryl died? I'll need
the duty logs from the Santa Susana
Field Lab, Mr. Director.

TRINITY

Raul will see to it.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR

Yes sir.

TRINITY

Feel free to look around, Raul, and
Dr. Hox will escort you.

INT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LAB SL-1 NUCLEAR REACTOR - LATER

Richard has no idea what he's looking for but he observes his
tour guide, Hox. In the control room, Richard nervously taps
a dosimeter radiation badge while Raul circles like a hawk.

RICHARD

Looks like you had some action in
here Dr. Hox.

HOX

Very observant Lieutenant. Just
some overheating.

RICHARD

And something hit the ceiling.

HOX

How can you say?

RICHARD

Well, there's a piece of clothing up there.

HOX

Well, I'll be damned.

RICHARD

Any more incidents?

HOX

Just the Sodium Reactor, we had a minor excursion. Our other reactor.

RICHARD

Other reactor? A minor excursion?

HOX

Yes, a minor nuclear reaction. Some overheating. Like you. You sweat a lot Lieutenant, I notice.

A puff of smoke emerges from Hox's pipe. It resembles a mini atomic mushroom cloud. Richard sweeps it sway.

INT. RICHARD'S HOME - SILVERLAKE

Richard exhausted, slumps dead into the couch. Vida, lemonade in hand, decides to ignore him and downs it herself. She too slumps asleep like Rip Van Winkle into a chair and starts snoozing.

Vida wakes with a start. She's clutching the Geiger counter.

VIDA

I'm turning into you. You should see a doctor Richy.

RICHARD

That's why you're all wound up. Give me this silly thing.

He's going under again and jolts awake then falls back under.

VIDA

Richard. Richard?

Too late, he's already snoring.

VIDA (CONT'D)

You are the weirdest white boy I ever met.

(MORE)

VIDA (CONT'D)

It's like being married to Rip Van
Winkle. Wake up, Lieutenant!

But Richard sinks deeper.

EXT. OUTSIDE RICHARD'S HOME - SILVERLAKE - AFTERNOON

KIDS are playing baseball in the street. They wack a really fast ball straight at Richard and he catches it reflexively, astounding the kids. BASEBALL KID, 10, red-haired and freckles out of a Norman Rockwell poster, runs over.

RICHARD

Don't be breaking my windows, boys.

BASEBALL KID

We won't mister. That was an
amazing catch! Zowee!

VIDA

Take this damn cat with you!

Vida hurls the cat, who lands on Richard's shoulder then bounces off lightly and on to the car roof.

INT. RICHARD'S POLICE CHEVY - CONTINUOUS

Richard fires up his Chevy but the kitten is already in.

RICHARD

Beat it, Kitty. I said scam.
Scam. Scrammed?

The cat digs into the rear window and Richard muses.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

All right, you have been warned.
Buckle up.

The kitten looks like the cat who got the cream. Richard stares at The Conqueror flyer and starts to fall asleep then fights his way back to consciousness by slapping his face.

EXT. BROWN DERBY PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Richard wakes from a daydream as he screeches into the Brown Derby on Wilshire Boulevard in a sweat. A perky PARKING ATTENDANT, 20s, rushes out all full of vim and vigor.

BROWN DERBY PARKING HOP
 Get your keys, sir? Mister are you
 OK? These swamp coolers are pretty
 cool. Do they work?

RICHARD
 Yeah, thanks, kid. Just get me an
 iced coffee, will you?

He slips the kid two bucks and plays with his case.

EXT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - SIMI HILLS - LATER

Stubbornly Richard pulls up again still slurping coffee from
 the Brown Derby. FEDERAL POLICE seem determined to keep him
 out. MURPHY, 60s, looks battle-hardened and saunters over.

MURPHY
 You're the LAPD cop who came here
 to show off.

RICHARD
 See this badge?

Murphy snatches it away.

MURPHY
 Looks pretty tinny to me.

Murphy tosses it to O'NEAL, 60s, who looks just as TOUGH.

RICHARD
 Where do they find you clowns, at
 bars, working as bouncers?

Murphy's fist springs like a sideways jackhammer and smashes
 into Richard's ribs. We actually hear them "CRACK". O'Neal
 follows with a left to the solar plexus which has Richard
 doubled over until the agony of his ribs flings him upright.

MURPHY
 The teeth?

O'NEAL
 The teeth.

A massive army boot crunches down on Richard's mouth and we
 can see the teeth popping out like large white chiclets.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)
 Not bad. Let's get this fellow and
 his car over the side of the hill.

Before they can roll Richard and his vehicle over the side of the hill Sydney appears in a tight white cotton sundress complete with headscarf and sunglasses. She's a knockout. A deadly knockout.

And she's also holding a small, feminine pistol in each hand - .25 caliber Fabrique Nationale Baby Browning pistols.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)
A goddamn woman.

SYDNEY
Just in case I miss massa.

She unfurls her natural locks and jettisons the scarf, even the cops stop and take notice.

O'NEAL
You can't kill shit with those cap guns, missy.

SYDNEY
Oh, I don't intends to do any killings, mister. Just maiming.

She aims at their crotches. They toy with the idea of going for their guns but think better of it.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Drop 'em, gramps.

MURPHY
Gramps, why you black...

Before they can utter an epithet she's pistol-whipped them both at the same time. They crumble. She picks up Richard.

RICHARD
Thanks, Sydney. Now, I really can take care of myself.

SYDNEY
Yeah, white boy, I can see. C'mon soldier, move your ass.

She humps him into the back of his car. They take off down the hill. She takes a slurp of the coffee.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Brown Derby?

RICHARD
Yeah, how'd you know?

EXT. BOX CANYON - CONTINUOUS

On the road below the "Hill" Sydney nurses Richard's wounds.

SYDNEY

Well, what did you find out?

RICHARD

That my army dentures were getting old.

Richard slips in a new set.

SYDNEY

Cute. I need you to go back and find me some evidence. Evidence that this place is fogging my film.

RICHARD

I'll get right on it ma'am.

EXT. BOX CANYON - CONTINUOUS

Richard is throwing up by the side of the road while Sydney holds his tie out of the way. He starts shaking and she holds his hand. He flicks it away then reaches out again for her firm grip.

SYDNEY

That's OK baby, I'm here.

Sydney gracefully hops back to avoid the splatter while Richard throws up.

EXT. MUSSO AND FRANK GRILL - HOLLYWOOD - DAY

DINERS, most dressed in suits and dresses as per the era, line up patiently at the famous Hollywood Restaurant. Richard and Sydney are led right in to a corner booth.

INT. MUSSO AND FRANK GRILL - CONTINUOUS

Richard nurses a Gimlet and Sydney nurses Richard. Sydney's holding what looks like riding gloves.

RICHARD

What's with the gloves? Look like they'd fit your doll.

Sydney just stares beyond him, ignoring the question.

SYDNEY

Let's take you home and look after you. Are you falling asleep? What the...? Hello?

INT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL - DOWNTOWN LA - NIGHT

The TV is on and Richard is watching President Eisenhower sending the 101st Airborne to Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Sydney watches too, from behind Richard with her hands in his pockets.

The firehoses are out and they're being used on the black high schoolers. The TV scene shakes Richard -- one of the girls on the screen looks just like Vida.

SYDNEY

No, just the nuts, not the banana.

RICHARD

But...

SYDNEY

It's a lovely banana but I don't do bananas. Yours looks like them firehoses. Can we turn this news off?

RICHARD

No, no leave it on, please.

He tries to direct her hand, she swats it away and Richard moves in for a kiss. Sydney pulls him in, and tastes the blood on his mouth which smears on her cheek.

SYDNEY

Very erotic.

Richard watches the big fire hoses being blasted against black civil rights protestors in the south.

RICHARD

Fire hose.

He starts man-mauling her breasts, kneading them like dough.

SYDNEY

Oh, I bet your wife loves that. Gently, Richard. Gently.

RICHARD
Well it's hard through the Playtex
WonderBra.

SYDNEY
Black women probably find you
irresistible huh?

RICHARD
Uh-huh.

SYDNEY
So you figure you can phone it in?

RICHARD
Uh-huh.

She goes to knee him in the nuts but he's already there and
their knees bump with an ugly KLACK.

SYDNEY
Wise guy. It's not hard. See?

She slips off her bra and pushes his face into her breasts.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Don't forget the left one
Lieutenant.

RICHARD
Same to you, Syd. So this is all we
do?

SYDNEY
It's all we do. It's enough for me.

They fall back on the bed. Richard starts snoring.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Uh-oh, what happened, you falling
asleep here?

RICHARD
I'm sorry but I can't. What is it
about you and testicles anyway?

SYDNEY
What is it about you and black
women?

RICHARD
I asked first.

SYDNEY
Slumming with the po' dark girls,
huh, Richy?

RICHARD
And what is it about you and loud
noises Syd?

SYDNEY
Nosey, nosey. My brother lost his
hearing in one ear because some cop
blasted his gun too close to his
face.

RICHARD
So you decided to get back at the
police.

SYDNEY
I couldn't become one so I opted
for the next best thing. A dick.
Don't forget your guns and shit.

RICHARD
Doppelgänger? Your brother. A twin?

She's getting testy and tugs on his nuts, making him wince.
She notices his small pistol.

SYDNEY
Drop it. What's with the toy gun?

He pulls out the paratrooper pistol as if to explain, but
slumps back on the bed and falls fast asleep.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
What is it? Hello, drugs?
Narcolepsy? What does your wife
think of this shit? Not my problem.
Richy!

Sydney pulls up his boxers to cover his privates but not
before getting herself one last grope.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
I finally have you where I want you
white boy.

INT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL - DOWNTOWN LA - MORNING

Richard wakes with a start, finds himself in bed with Sydney.
He's still mostly clothed. Relief.

SYDNEY
What's your wife gonna say?

RICHARD
She knows I can't resist beautiful
colored girls.

SYDNEY
'Colored', like a rainbow?

RICHARD
Like black. She'll understand.

SYDNEY
Will she? Hell she will.

She goes to pistol-whip him but he traps her easily.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Why I ought to...

RICHARD
...Yeah, you ought to.

SYDNEY
Then just kiss me.

RICHARD
Teeth or no teeth?

SYDNEY
Let's try without.

They smooch. It's pretty sloppy without the teeth.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Get your white ass back to your
wife. We could have been great
together Richy-Rich.

RICHARD
We are great.

EXT. RICHFIELD GAS STATION - HOLLYWOOD BLVD. - DAY

Richard and Vida pull up in the unmarked Chevy for some gas. They're surrounded by attendants who check the oil, and tires and fill the tank. One of them, a GREASY KID, 20s, gives Richard a dirty look when he sees Vida.

RICHARD
Sody pop my lark?

VIDA

Hmm-mm, you treating me so nice
Richy; what you done? I'll get the
tip.

Vida extends her gloved hands to the greasy kid, it's a dollar so no small amount for the day. There's a hole in her glove. But he hesitates.

VIDA (CONT'D)

C'mon sonny, I won't bite.

Richard is lapping it up and gets a smile from another unknown man, SCOTTY BOWERS, standing in the shade, who nods appreciatively and tips his cap.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - OIL WELLS - DAY

Venice Beach is still producing oil in the late 1950s. Its famous canals are filled with tar and derricks come down to the shoreline. Richard and Vida are picnicking and already getting dirty looks from some MIDDLE-AGED WHITE WOMEN.

RICHARD

It's OK, ma'am, just cleaning the
tar off this woman. This black
woman!

The grumpy women huff and puff away.

VIDA

My momma said they used to come
from Watts and ride boats in the
canals. They all filled with sludge
and oil now.

RICHARD

That's progress for you.

VIDA

You remember we came here on our
first date?

RICHARD

You kept staring at me, then
we went to Jack's at the
Beach.

VIDA (CONT'D)

You kept staring at my tits,
then we went to Jack's on the
Beach.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I was staring at your legs.

VIDA

These legs?

RICHARD
Those are the ones.

VIDA
Some men at the studio asked about the Geiger counter. Said I shouldn't be messing around with such things. That you were asking too many questions.

RICHARD
What did these guys look like?

VIDA
I dunno, all you white people look alike to me.

RICHARD
Vida.

VIDA
"Tough." Could you drop the case, Richy? We could move away from here. Go somewhere different. The Center of the Earth.

RICHARD
That would be nice but no, I gotta see this through. Vida...I...

VIDA
...I don't wanna fucking hear about it Richy, just don't tell me, OK?

RICHARD
I gotta go out later. Alone. Vida, I love you!

She storms off, back-kicking sand all over him.

VIDA
I know you do!

EXT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - SIMI HILLS - NIGHT

Richard clammers clumsily over a fence at the SSFL, checking it's not electrified. After wandering around lost for a while he realizes he's being shadowed. He's suddenly approached by Bob Dale.

DALE
No getting in that way, Kemosabe.

RICHARD
Who's gonna stop me? You?

DALE
No, them. Here, hide in the old
Chumash cave.

Richard fires up his Zippo lighter for light as Dale points to some AEC guards and disappears into the shadows.

EXT. BURRO FLATS PAINTED CAVE - NIGHT

Dale points out the Chumash cave pictographs.

RICHARD
Pictographs.

DALE
The Chumash Indians spoke of coming
white men and giant arrows which
would fly once more to the people
in the sky.

RICHARD
Rockets.

DALE
Let me show you a secret way to the
reactor in Area IV. That's why you
came, right?

EXT. SSFL SL-1 REACTOR - SIMI HILLS - NIGHT

Dale guides Richard inside the sealed-up lab. As Richard gets a closer look at the rods he begins to piece together the crime scene.

INT. SSFL SL-1 REACTOR - CONTINUOUS

Dale starts cleaning up through habit as Richard watches.

RICHARD
Tampons?

DALE
Kotex and Bactine - we found it's
the best, cheapest way to clean up
this stuff. Everything else just
kinda spreads it around.

RICHARD
The radiation. And you are?

DALE
Dale, Bob Dale, I work here.

He extends a hand to shake - which Richard declines.

RICHARD
Junior technician.

DALE
They call me 'the kid'. Take these,
just in case.

He places a bottle of iodine pills in Richard's hand.

RICHARD
Iodine.

DALE
I was told it can help block
radioactive iodine from being
absorbed by the thyroid.

RICHARD
I don't need any iodine pills, kid.
These rods. They act as a safety
measure?

DALE
The control rods are attached to
the lifting machinery
by electromagnets. In case of power
failure, the control rods fall
automatically, under gravity, into
the pile to stop the reaction. They
call quickly shutting down a
reactor like this...

RICHARD
...scramming. It looks like it's
been lifted nearly two feet.

DALE
Three. To restart the reactor, the
operator only needs to lift the
control rods four inches but they
went way higher.

RICHARD
Suicide? You don't work on this
reactor normally.

DALE

No, I work on the SRE.

RICHARD

The Sodium Reactor Experiment.

DALE

I wouldn't spend too long in this building. You'll get about 20 rads.

Richard blanches, starts sweating and looking nauseous. He now slips the pills purposefully into his pocket.

There is a light and some MEN approaching. When Richard turns around Dale has vanished. He goes to toss away the pills but, to leave no evidence, puts them back in his pocket.

INT. MAIL SLOTS - LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN OFFICES - DAY

Doc is digging through his old mail until he finds one from Kodak. It's the photo from Hiroshima above the explosion.

"DOC" DYNE

I'll be damned.

INT. COLES BAR - DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - DAY

Richard crunches a French Dip sandwich and nurses a Daiquiri at Cole's Bar.

INT. TOILET - COLES BAR - LATER

Richard barfs down the bowl, sweat all over his brow. He looks green, fumbles for the iodine tablets, ponders then crunches down a few pills. There's blood in his vomit. As he staggers back to his seat, he remembers.

FLASHBACK

INT. NAGASAKI HOSPITAL - DAY

Richard is wading through blood-addled vomit. It looks like a Japanese field hospital. JAPANESE CIVILIANS, covered in hideous bandages, skin falling off in sheets, walk past him like ghosts.

A line of anti-aircraft gunners, their eyes melted out from looking up at the nuclear flash, patiently stand with hands on the shoulders of the men in front of them.

END FLASHBACK

INT. COLES BAR

Doc is at the booth. It's unclear how long he's been there.

"DOC" DYNE
What the hell happened to you?

RICHARD
French Dip sandwich, too rich.

"DOC" DYNE
That'll do it every time. And the Daiquiri.

RICHARD
So you said you found something?

"DOC" DYNE
No, you said I found something.

Doc hands over a letter on Kodak stationery.

"DOC" DYNE (CONT'D)
From that private dick at Kodak -
his name is Sydney.

RICHARD
I know.

Inside it is the photo of Hiroshima which could only be taken from above - after the bomb was dropped.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
I told you I wasn't going nuts.

"DOC" DYNE
You are nuts. Jeez, you look grey.
Where have you been?

RICHARD
Looking at petroglyphs. Listen
thanks for this doc, it means a
lot.

"DOC" DYNE
Get some rest Richy, you look like
shit.

Richard stares at the photo, falling asleep.

INT. WOODLAND HILLS MOTION PICTURE ASSOC. HOSPITAL - DAY

His hospital chart lists, "Armendáriz, Pedro, Actor, Kidney tumor, terminal." PEDRO ARMENDÁRIZ, 50s the famous Mexican actor, is lying in a hospital bed looking ashen.

ARMENDÁRIZ

(Coughing heavily)

No, it wasn't the smoking. It was the Goddamn movie set.

RICHARD

The "Conqueror?".

ARMENDÁRIZ

Yeah, the Duke got it too. We all got a lungful in Utah. It was downwind of the atomic bombs. The whole place was radioactive, bad enough, but then that asshole Hayward Hough shipped 200 tons of local dirt to the sound stages.

RICHARD

They used soil from Utah to match the locations for the studio shots.

ARMENDÁRIZ

Smart guy. I figure I've got maybe one more film in me and I'm finished.

RICHARD

Why not just call it quits and rest?

ARMENDÁRIZ

It's to make sure my kids are taken care of.

RICHARD

If Hayward Hough knew of the dangers why didn't they shoot somewhere else?

ARMENDÁRIZ

We were told it was safe, not to worry. We were on location for 13 weeks.

RICHARD

But they gave you Geiger-counters all the same.

ARMENDÁRIZ

What can I tell you, my friend,
life is a gamble.

RICHARD

What is it?

ARMENDÁRIZ

Kidney cancer.

RICHARD

What's your next movie, Mr.
Armendáriz?

ARMENDÁRIZ

My next and probably my last. I'm
playing some Turkish spy. It's set
in Istanbul and I get to work with
that British guy. Bond? What's his
damn name?

RICHARD

007, James Bond? The Ian Fleming
books. I've read them. Some unknown
British actor, I'm sure it's a
career killer.

ARMENDÁRIZ

Everyone in LA's a film critic,
even the cops. It's called To
Russia...no, 'From Russia with
Love.' You're gonna love it.

RICHARD

I know I will. Thanks, Mr.
Armendáriz.

ARMENDÁRIZ

Call me Pedro. Autograph?

RICHARD

Yes, please. Pedro.

As Richard leaves he turns and shouts to Armendáriz.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Sean Connery!

Armendáriz smiles and waves back.

EXT. THE WILD GOOSE YACHT - NEWPORT BEACH - DAY

Richard is on the forward deck of the Wild Goose, a converted WWII minesweeper, which now belongs to the "Duke", John Wayne, the conservative movie star.

JOHN WAYNE

Yep, she was a minesweeper during the war. Her hull is three-inch vertical grain Douglas fir.

RICHARD

So it wouldn't set off magnetic mines...

JOHN WAYNE

...smart fella. Yep. This stuff here, that's all my additions. I put in modern radar.

RICHARD

She's a beaut, sir.

JOHN WAYNE

Call me "Duke". Refresh your drink, you're falling behind Kemosabe?

RICHARD

Duke. Just two fingers, please.

The Duke pours a stiff one. It's like half a glass. Richard's already starting to slur his words.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I saw Pedro Armendáriz.

JOHN WAYNE

I know. You want to know if we all got radiation poisoning in Utah?

RICHARD

Well, did you?

JOHN WAYNE

Well, I feel pretty good. So no, and there's no danger.

RICHARD

So...

JOHN WAYNE

I'm fine, been checked. It's overblown.

(MORE)

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

The military has to test atomic weapons somewhere. If not Yucca Flat then where?

RICHARD

True enough.

Wayne pours him another stiff one.

JOHN WAYNE

Drink up.

PILAR WAYNE, 30s, John Wayne's gorgeous, elegant, social-climbing Peruvian wife, saunters out with some sandwiches. Pilar, dark, Latina, is delicate, almost fairy-like.

PILAR

Now, don't tell me my husband didn't feed you, Lieutenant Charlton? Please, please sit.

JOHN WAYNE

I do the drinks, you do the food, right señora?

EXT. NEWPORT BEACH PIER - LATER

Sydney is leaning on a jetty, all decked out in nautical gear. Richard, trying to walk straight, can hardly express enough surprise.

RICHARD

Syd!

SYDNEY

Syd? Surprised? Had a few drinks did we?

RICHARD

I thought we were...

SYDNEY

Done? What you find out?

RICHARD

How'd you find me? Never mind. You wanted one last kiss.

The spot-on guess shakes her momentarily.

SYDNEY

Why no, I just wanted to see what you found out from the Duke.

(MORE)

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I also wanted to know what it felt like with teeth.

RICHARD

Really?

SYDNEY

Really. But you can give me a last kiss if you want. Vida won't mind.

She grabs his tie, and slides her fingers down it slowly till her hand is at zipper height.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I thought so.

She now pulls him into her face, shaking away her sun hat to give him the world's most sensuous kiss. He ain't kissing but he doesn't pull away. It's wet, long, and enveloping. Richard starts to melt. Again. And falls into the kiss.

Some WHITE MIDDLE-AGED MATRONS, 50s, tsk-tsk and turn away. Sydney uses the hat as a shield from their prying eyes.

Done with him, she pushes Richard away but she's still holding his tie and it's the only thing keeping him upright.

Finally, she lets him fall and he careens in slow-motion into the open deck of a small boat onto a bundle of slimy fish in a net which breaks his fall.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Should feel right at home Richy!

Richard recovers his wits and bounds up to the dock but Sydney's vanished. Several 55-gallon drums are lying around and Richard gently nudges them, feeling the weight.

EXT. WILSHIRE BLVD. NEAR MIRACLE MILE AND THE MAY CO. - DAY

Richard drives out of the May Company, holding a new pair of women's gloves. He notices a landscaped billboard for Hayward Hough's movie "The Outlaw" starring Jane Russell. He turns down the police monitor and tunes the radio.

RICHARD

Maybe it's time to pay a visit to the famous Mr. Hough.

RADIO DJ (O.S.)

And now boys and girls, the number one hit; still for the year 1959: Bobby Darin sings "Mack the Knife."

Richard sings along as he drives.

RICHARD (SINGING)

"Oh, the shark, babe, has such
teeth, dear; And it shows them
pearly white; Just a jackknife has
old MacHeath, babe...Scarlet
billows start to spread; Fancy
gloves, oh, wears old MacHeath,
babe..."

EXT. GRIFFITH PARK OBSERVATORY - DAY

The outline of a bullet seems to mimic the Griffith
Observatory as Richard aimlessly plays with the .45 long.

He watches the clouds whiz by from the west. They seem dark,
forbidding, rolling to the prairies. Suddenly there's a hot
blast from the North East as the Santa Ana's blow in,
scattering picnic blankets and paper cups everywhere.

Some YOUNG GIRLS, 20s, flirt playfully as their skirts lift
high in the wind.

YOUNG BOBBY SOXER

Don't look, mister!

Richard breaks his maudlin mood and feels briefly at peace.

EXT. RICHARD'S HOME - SILVERLAKE - NIGHT

MEN DRESSED AS COPS, SIDLEY ARMITAGE, 40s, businesslike and
brusque, and ARROWSMITH, 30s, dense and talkative, approach
in the dark. Arrowsmith seems to be munching on some nuts.

VIDA

Richard?

ARMITAGE

Oh, it's regarding Lt. Charlton for
sure ma'am.

She instinctively shuts the screen door which Armitage easily
pushes through like it's mist.

VIDA

I'm not going to resist, to fight
you.

ARROWSMITH

Well, that's wise ma'am. But I am
afraid that we will hurt you.

(MORE)

ARROWSMITH (CONT'D)

Miscegenation is a sin that's for sure. The Lord done said it.

As Arrowsmith reaches Vida grabs the Geiger counter and brains Armitage, who keels over like a falling building. She's also holding a baseball bat behind her back.

ARROWSMITH (CONT'D)

Pretty tricky but not tricky enough.

She opens her blouse, he's distracted. He can't resist.

VIDA

You can touch them, they ain't gonna bite you.

Arrowsmith reaches out to touch her as Vida opens her dress some more and Arrowsmith can't avert his gaze. While he's gawking, she clubs him like a large landed fish.

But Arrowsmith still reaches. It doesn't matter as Vida, summoning up the power of a thousand lynched black women, brings the Geiger Counter down on his head for the coup-de-grace.

ARROWSMITH

A Geiger...a Gaga...

VIDA

Good night.

She clubs him again, this time with the bat. She actually gets into a baseball stance and it looks like Arrowsmith's head will leave the stadium.

Vida starts cleaning up, until she notices Richard at the door. He steps in gingerly, gun ready.

RICHARD

Are you OK baby?

VIDA

Yeah, mostly.

RICHARD

What, they couldn't resist the sight of your tits? Lemme see them again.

VIDA

You can't.

She pulls down her dress once more and drops the bat.

RICHARD
You colored girls sure are tough.

VIDA
Don't mess with us.

RICHARD
Yes, ma'am. I wish you'd always
greet me like this.

VIDA
Like this pale face?

She puts on a stiff upper lip as she gives him another flash.

VIDA (CONT'D)
It's all...

RICHARD
...Jake.

VIDA (CONT'D)
...Jake.

INT. RICHARD'S HOME - SILVERLAKE - LATER

They clean up the blood and wrap the bodies in carpets.
Richard's sweating as they lug the big, heavy corpses.

VIDA
Are these thugs from the atomic
place you working on?

RICHARD
I warrant.

While sipping coffee Richard checks their wallets for IDs.
Nothing, just a private eye license, available anywhere.
There is a business card: Kodak Film labs, 7000 Romaine St.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
7000 Romaine, isn't that Hayward
Hough's H.Q?

VIDA
Private dicks? But the uniforms.

RICHARD
No dicks now. I should take you on
patrol with me.

She breaks down, starts sobbing. Richard hugs her tightly.

VIDA
I ain't never been so scared
Richard. Never. Enough of this.

RICHARD

Did you ever meet a colored kid at
RKO, called Darryl?

She stares ahead, shaking her head.

EXT. INGLEWOOD OIL FIELD - LA CIENEGA BLVD. - NIGHT

The Oil pumpjacks nod and do their stuff, creaking and
braying in the dark like donkeys, still pumping oil off La
Cienega Blvd. The wells are deep, dark and, rarely touched.
Manny and Norm help hump the loaded carpets.

MANNY

That's a lot of oil wells.

RICHARD

Back in 1892 Doheny drilled the
first well to strike oil in
Southern California, over there at
Dodger Stadium.

NORM

Where do you think these big fellas
come from, Mrs. Charlton?

VIDA

I dunno Norm. Box Canyon I reckon.

NORM

Not from around here, I warrant.

MANNY

The black Beverly Hills.

RICHARD

Vida and I shopped for a place in
Baldwin Hills didn't we hon?

VIDA

Yeah, we were doing fine 'till they
found out you was white then the
escrow fell through.

They all laugh it up.

VIDA (CONT'D)

I'll leave your skinny white ass in
the car next time Richy. Beautiful
kitchen, two-car garage. Swimming
pool, walk-in closet! Godamnit
Richy-Rich.

RICHARD
Everybody dig. Dig and dump.

MANNY
Nice neighbors?

VIDA
Maybe just as well. Richard's
trashy ass be hitting on all my
neighbors' wives getting in trouble
with the homeowners' association.

EXT. 7000 ROMAINE ST. HAYWARD HOUGH HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Richard gazes up at the gorgeous, white Art Deco building
from which Hough runs his worldwide empire.

INT. 7000 ROMAINE ST. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Richard notices a Kodak logo on the directory. White-gloved
employees man switchboards in a hive of activity.

INT. 7000 ROMAINE ST. - SCREENING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

HAYWARD HOUGH, 40s, the reclusive billionaire complete with
fedora, is watching *The Conqueror*. Sitting next to him is
RANDOLPH SCOTT, 30s, the actor, wearing just a wrap.

Scott, tall, lean, and blonde, is one of Hollywood's leading
men and also reputed to be Cary Grant's "wife".

RICHARD
I didn't think you'd agree to meet
Mr. Hough.

RANDOLPH SCOTT
We're not too fond of cops around
here.

RICHARD
I can imagine. But hardly discrete
was it, propositioning a vice cop
in Griffith Park Zoo?

RANDOLPH SCOTT
It was the Merry-Go-Round and I was
merely asking him for a light.

RICHARD

I'm not vice and I'm not interested
in your vices. How much did the
bribe cost you, Mr. Hough?

HAYWARD HOUGH

Less than you'd think. Vice cops
are always cheap. Anyway, you're
here about The Conqueror.

RICHARD

I'd like to know your whereabouts
on the night of August 15.

HAYWARD HOUGH

Randolph knows my calendar, don't
you, dearest?

RANDOLPH SCOTT

He was with me getting gas at the
Richfield station at 5777 Hollywood
Boulevard.

RICHARD

Scotty Bowers. All evening?

RANDOLPH SCOTT

We needed some work done.

HAYWARD HOUGH

A libation before you go?

RICHARD

No thanks. I guess we're done.

The lights go out and the projector starts.

EXT. 7000 ROMAINE ST. - LATER

Richard sits in his car sweating, trying to get the side-
mounted air conditioner working. His mind wanders to the gas
station trying to imagine the scene between Hough and Bowers.

DAY DREAM

EXT. RICHFIELD GAS STATION - 5777 HOLLYWOOD BLVD. - DAY

Richard imagines the scene at the gas station where SCOTTY
BOWERS, 30s, good looking and famous provider of escorts to
gay Hollywood, tops off Hayward Hough's Lincoln Town-Car.

HAYWARD HOUGH

That colored boy over there. I'd like to take him to dinner but...

SCOTTY

...you want to be 'discrete'.

HAYWARD HOUGH

Yes.

SCOTTY

The trailer out back is available if you like, Mr. Hough. You can suck his cock for twenty bucks.

HAYWARD HOUGH

And please join me yourself this afternoon. Come for a swim in my pool. Cool off. My card.

SCOTTY

That's very kind.

Scotty feels the weight and quality of the business card. 211 Muirfield Road, Hancock Park, near the golf course.

BACK TO THE PRESENT.

Richard snaps out of his daydream then starts to fall asleep.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HWY - PARADISE COVE CAFE, MALIBU - DAY

By the side of the PCH, Norm swats away flies as a grumpy California Highway Patrolman, AFRICAN AMERICAN, 40s, gives him a ticket. This cop looks like he has an agenda and keeps an itchy finger on his sidearm at all times.

NORM

Hey brother. How about some professional courtesy here? I can't have been doing more than five over the limit.

CHP COP

Ten "brother" and I suggest you get that tail-light fixed.

NORM

Tail-light is fine, brother. What's with the attitude?

The CHP cop kicks in Norm's taillight.

CHP COP
 Here, \$25 ticket for a broken tail-
 light. Get it fixed.

INT. NORM'S FORD GALAXY - CONTINUOUS

Norm takes off down the PCH but he immediately runs into TWO MORE WHITE CHP cops riding on Harleys.

INT. STUDEBAKER ON PCH - DRIVEN BY WHITE FAMILY - CONTINUOUS

The SUBURBAN WHITE FAMILY all stare into the rearview mirror as a black man, Norm, is beaten by nightsticks by two white CHP bike cops by the side of the road.

Nobody stops but everyone notices, watching it like a drive-in movie. They club Norm like a cat ready for skinning.

EXT. MANNY'S HOME - BOYLE HEIGHTS - DAY

At Manny's house in Boyle Heights, an unmarked car pulls up. Peters and Lorey slide out into the bright East LA light.

Their LAPD uniforms look like they just came out of a costume department.

PETERS
 Bonas Dias senorita.

Manny's wife Natalia, instantly smells trouble.

NATALIA
 Señora.

LOREY
 Your husband home "señora"?

NATALIA
 I think you know he isn't.

LOREY
 We'd like to look around. Here's a warrant.

NATALIA
 I can't read it, it's in English.

PETERS
 Trust us it's bona fide. Heck,
 that's Spanish, right?

They barge in, knocking stuff away, ripping down photos.

INT. MANNY'S HOME - BOYLE HEIGHTS - MOMENTS LATER

Peters and Lorey are like two kids in a rival's fort. They tear the place to pieces.

NATALIA

What are you looking for? Tell me!
What? No, please not the curtains.
Por favor.

LOREY

Where is it senorita? Where are the
goods?

NATALIA

Jose, be momma's good boy and call
your papa. Call Janey baby, she'll
know where to find him!

EXT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - SIMI HILLS - CONTINUOUS

Richard's car radio crackles.

RICHARD

Car 28 here. Lt. Charlton, go
ahead.

POLICE DISPATCHER

Very sorry sir but your friend
Doc's had an accident. He's at UCLA
Medical Center in Westwood.

RICHARD

The new one?

POLICE DISPATCHER

Yes sir. Ward D, for Delta.

INT. HOSPITAL E.R. WARD - UCLA MEDICAL CENTER - LATER

Doc is moribund. He holds out his hand to Richard.

RICHARD

What happened Doc? They said you
slipped, hit your head.

"DOC" DYNE

They don't know shit. They came on me in the dark Rich. As I was leaving Wonderland Drive.

RICHARD

Who Doc, who came on you?

"DOC" DYNE

Some Atomics International goons. They were huge. They stole all my files on Yucca Flat.

RICHARD

What'd they want with your files?

Doc hands him an envelope, with a 7000 Romaine address.

"DOC" DYNE

Here, here's some more photos of Darryl Legg. And some black girl. Utah.

Richard stares at the photo but can't quite make her out.

Doc dies.

RICHARD

Doc, Godamnit. Doc!

Richard pats and holds Doc's hand for a long time until a NURSE, 60s, and sympathetic and kind, gently peels it away.

INT. EL CHOLLO RESTAURANT - WESTERN AVE. - NIGHT

Richard pours over photos and a radiation badge while sipping mescal. He's sweating profusely, dabbing his brow with ice and fingering a cigarette from Doc. The owner, CECILIA, 50s and muy simpatico, offers a rag.

CECILIA

Ricardo, Ricky Rick. Go home, let me cool you off.

RICHARD

Gracias Cecilia. I'm hot. No air conditioning?

CECILIA

Nada tonight, lo siento.

INT. RICHARD'S HOME - SILVERLAKE - NIGHT

Vida is doing the laundry and notices lipstick on Richard's shirt collar. She goes to rinse it out as if it's a common thing then loses control, tears the shirt collar off, and tosses the shirt back in the wash.

EXT. RICHARD'S HOME - SILVERLAKE - LATE NIGHT

The house is dark and Richard's butter is cold. It's late.

RICHARD

Hello, Vida, is you home?

Their Steelman Transitape tape recorder is on the kitchen table with a note: "For Richy-Rich." Richard clicks it on.

VIDA (V.O.)

"Dear Richard, I've gone to my mom's. Baby, I've always overlooked your peccadilloes but I can't deal with your pecker and its never-ending appetite for coal-scuttle blondes. So enjoy your latest colored girl and before you collar a nod tonight why don't you look into your own soul. This case is gonna kill us both. I can't take anymore baby. Yours, Vida."

Richard purposefully picks up the Geiger counter and some Southern Comfort.

He notices an inscription in thick black marker: "To D from D," with a small heart. Something clicks and a light goes off in his head.

EXT. RICHARD'S HOME IN SILVERLAKE - CONTINUOUS

Richard hops into his car but it's already occupied by two Atomic Energy Commission detectives, the thuggish and humorless ALVIN SMITH and PERCEVAL JONES, 30s.

INT\EXT. RICHARD'S POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Smith, wearing glasses, looks more like the night manager at a Woolworths, and Jones resembles the guy in the accounts department but looks are deceiving as they wave their badges.

SMITH

What's up Doc?

JONES
Doc ain't up no more.

They crack up at their quip. Richard seethes.

RICHARD
Alias Smith and Jones? What do you
two beatniks want?

JONES
Someone's cruisin' for a bruisin'.

SMITH
We want to send you a message.

RICHARD
Then use Western Union.

Richard gets up to leave. The two thugs, in unison, elbow Richard's face which seems to fold into two. He's almost out. His eyes are all puffed out and nearly closed.

JONES
From Dr. Trinity.

RICHARD
Doctor? Trinity. Well, ain't that a
bite?

SMITH
Stay away from The Hill.

They drag him out of the car. Smith swings a billy club into Richard's gut and Richard heaves his El Chollo meal.

Then Jones swipes him viciously with brass knuckles, leaving a jagged cut across Richard's cheek. On his knees now, they prepare to finish him off.

SMITH (CONT'D)
Agh, that's disgusting. After you.

JONES
No, after you.

RICHARD
After me.

Smith is about to deliver the coup de grace when Richard smashes the Southern Comfort bottle, creating a jagged shard which he sinks into the black brogues of Smith.

Even in the dim 1950s streetlights, the blood can be seen a-gushing.

SMITH

Agh, you sonnofa...

Richard swipes at Jones but only slashes his waistcoat. The two thugs take off down the road running in the dark, LAUGHING and sinking into the darkness, almost invisible now.

Maybe 100 yards away already. There's no moon tonight.

Richard stoops to one knee and draws his .38. An impossible shot. Two impossible shots given the distance and darkness.

Jones, ahead of Smith, who's hobbling, is steaming along. Richard lets off two quick bursts. There seems no way he can make these shots. The thugs keep running. They seem to disappear under the canopy of the trees.

The two are almost invisible now.

EXT. SILVERLAKE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Jones' head suddenly tilts forward, then backward as a slug exits his left eye.

He crashes, arms tucked in, like a crocodile swimming, towards the sidewalk and straight into the rear window of a '48 Studebaker.

A split second later Smith stops, turns, and we realize he too has been snipered in the right eye and cashiers himself onto the pavement, sliding down like a bobsledder chafing his face away on the hard asphalt.

Richard takes a swig from the Southern Comfort bottle, spits out a piece of broken glass, and waterfalls the rest.

RICHARD

That's for Doc.

INT. PARKER CENTER - NIGHT

LAPD boss Pitcher pours out two scotches.

PITCHER

Have you heard of four missing AEC dicks? Didn't I ask you to stay away from the Atomic Energy Commission types and Trinity? Rich?

RICHARD

So many questions Pete.

PITCHER

Don't be a wise guy Rich. What the hell happened to your face? I said just check San Pedro and Santa Susana, I didn't say bring down the entire federal government on my head. I've got the AEC complaining you're beating up their investigators, the head of the Santa Susana Field Lab says you're harassing him...

RICHARD

Listen, Pete, the Intelligence Squad goes after the difficult crimes, mobsters, the odd stuff right?

PITCHER

Yeah, intelligence work. Stay in the shadows godamnit. Lordy.

RICHARD

Sometimes you have to come out of the shadows to catch the bad guys.

PITCHER

Whaddya got on this guy Trinity, Rich? This dead fellow up on the hill? Any arrests yet, leads?

RICHARD

Soon sir, soon.

PITCHER

You sure don't make things easy on yourself Rick. Colored wife, colored partner. What is it? Vice wasn't challenging enough?

Richard stares again at the pistol on Pitcher's desk.

PITCHER (CONT'D)

For protection. One of my detectives tried to kill me once, right where you're sitting.

RICHARD

What you do to make him want to kill you chief?

PITCHER

Just find the killer lieutenant.

INT. PARKER CENTER - DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Richard checks his calls from a mound of message slips.

Doris waves a message slip wrapped around a tube of roll-on deodorant.

DORIS
Lt. Charlton.

RICHARD
Doris.

DORIS
Do me a favor will you Lieutenant?

RICHARD
What's that Doris?

DORIS
Check your messages once in a blue.

RICHARD
I'll try.

DORIS
Don't try butterfly.

RICHARD
Do.

DORIS
Yes. Some gal from Kodak called.
Said she's returning back East.
She'd wire you with an update.
Sounded urgent, kinda sultry, know
what I mean?

RICHARD
I have no idea what you mean,
Doris. That it?

DORIS
Yeah, unless you want to put me
across your knee and throw me in a
cell.

RICHARD
Maybe one day, Doris.

DORIS
Oh yea, and she left this.

Doris hands over a box. Inside is a film canister. And some film sheets. They're mostly fogged or in the dark.

RICHARD

I'll be damned.

Some photos of Darryl in a tryst with Hayward Hough fall out. Doris sneaks a peek before Richard can hide them.

DORIS

You will, won't you? Nicely hung there. The white one.

INT. EL COYOTE RESTAURANT - WEST HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT

The margarita pitcher is almost empty. Richard and Norm are using tortilla chips as chess pieces.

RICHARD

What the hell happened to your face?

NORM

I said the wrong thing to some white cops.

RICHARD

Which was?

NORM

"Good morning officer." What the hell happened to yours?

They down some shots of mescal. And again.

RICHARD

Better?

NORM

No.

RICHARD

So. So. We bust in, so. Hop over the fence, check out the reactor, find the killer. Solve the case. Negative perspiration.

NORM

So?

Another round of Mescal arrives and they're nearly ready.

EXT. SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY - SIMI HILLS

Richard clumsily clammers over the fence, drunk, with Norm in tow. In an instant, Escobar and some GUARDS are on them.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR
 Would have been easier to go
 through the front gate, Lieutenant.

NORM
 We left a gun case behind.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR
 Let's see if we can help you find
 it, shall we, Sergeant.

EXT. COCA TEST STAND I - BUILDING 733 - NIGHT

As Raul escorts them, a Saturn 1b rocket on the test pad ignites with a BOOM and Norm jumps in surprise.

INT. TRINITY'S HOUSE - SANTA SUSANA HILL - NIGHT

A GUARD frisks them as Raul watches, circling, waiting to pounce, cat-like. He grabs their guns and Richard's hidden paratrooper pistol.

TRINITY
 Some brandy, Lieutenant? Sergeant
 Elden?

RICHARD
 This time I will, thanks.

TRINITY
 But you're a tough guy, right
 Lieutenant?

RICHARD
 That's right, Director.

SYDNEY (O.S.)
 I told y'all to be careful at The
 Hill, didn't I baby?

RICHARD
 You did.

Sydney emerges from the shadows, and sidles up to Trinity.

TRINITY

You see Lieutenant. You should have stayed on the right side of the fence.

RICHARD

Kodak knew all this time.

TRINITY

They don't care about milk supplies in the Midwest. They care about milking profits.

RICHARD

And The Conqueror?

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR

Take them away.

TRINITY

The Conqueror? We had nothing to do with that. That was the military. And Hayward Hough.

RICHARD

But why the cover-up? To explain away the sodium reactor meltdown?

TRINITY

What cover-up? The SRE excursion was a one-off.

RICHARD

So you just vent the gas over the San Fernando Valley?

TRINITY

Better than having a meltdown in Los Angeles.

RICHARD

Hardly. This conversation is going nowhere.

TRINITY

I disagree, it's going everywhere. What, you want to test atomic bombs in New Jersey? The Russians have 3,000 nuclear warheads pointed at us and you're worried about one dainty, elf-like black kid in a barrel?

The blood seems to drain from Sydney's face.

SYDNEY

What dainty black kid in a barrel?

TRINITY

To the green room, my dove.

SYDNEY

We never said anything about killing anyone.

TRINITY

You want to accompany them?

SYDNEY

No. Who said anything about killing?

TRINITY

You did. Your philandering brought you here, Lt. Charlton.

A moment as this sinks in for Richard.

SYDNEY

Who's the kid in the barrel? Just some black kid?

RICHARD

Your brother Darryl.

NORM

What?

RICHARD

Sydney's fraternal twin Darryl was having a homosexual affair with Director Trinity here. But he wasn't killed because he was a "friend of Dorothy".

TRINITY

Now you're just guessing. Take them to the reactor room.

NORM

Why?

RICHARD

I'll tell you why. They met when Darryl Legg was married to David Trinity's daughter and he didn't like the idea of a colored boy and his lily-white daughter, so he came up with the nuclear accident.

Trinity looks at his wrist-watch, and realizes.

TRINITY

The father and daughter Longines.

RICHARD

"Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tugging your white ewe." Hough egged on Trinity because he wanted Darryl for himself. So he played Iago to your Othello. You got jungle fever, used up your house boy, used up the black woman...

Richard stops in his tracks, almost figuring out the angles for himself. He sputters to a halt.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR

You mean black man.

RICHARD

Black man.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR

Cat got your tongue Lieutenant?

Richard, reflective for once, looks clean out of smart talk.

TRINITY

Othello. "Arise, arise, Awake the snorting citizens with the bell...Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you." But you're wrong.

RICHARD

He was going to kill Darryl inside the reactor but Darryl got wind of it, a fight broke out and the reactor went ballistic so to speak.

TRINITY

No, it wasn't like that.

RICHARD

It was like this: you were jealous of Hough's relationship with Darryl and in your jealousy and reluctance to share your lover, you had him killed.

TRINITY

I didn't want to kill Darryl, I wasn't a racist and I wasn't a homophobe. I just wanted to scare him.

SYDNEY

So you had him killed.

TRINITY

A tragic mistake.

NORM

The sodium reactor.

RICHARD

No, the SL-1.

TRINITY

The Argonne Low Power Reactor.

RICHARD

The explosion blew Darryl into the ceiling where he stayed for three days until someone noticed him. His body was undecomposed because it was so radioactive.

Norm, working the permutations, slugs down his brandy.

NORM

I'll be...

RICHARD

Kodak didn't care about the radioactive winds traveling east - they had already been forewarned by the AEC. Sydney here was working for Hayward Hough and Kodak. Hough agreed to the ruse if they helped him cover up the Conqueror fallout scandal.

TRINITY

Now you're guessing.

RICHARD

Am I that far off? Hough had his own problems with Kodak and wanted to protect his investment as a major stockholder.

NORM

Unbelievable.

RICHARD

They cut off Darryl's hands, not because of the fingerprints but because they were so radioactive.

NORM

I don't get it. Why wasn't Darryl at the bottom of the ocean? In that lead barrel, we'd never have found him in a million years?

RICHARD

Because Raul wanted to set up Director Trinity here. Raul frowned on the director's 'flamboyant' lifestyle and decided to get rid of Trinity. What Raul didn't count on were the gases given off by the corpse which lifted the airtight barrel to the surface.

Suddenly there's a silenced pistol shot from Sydney's direction.

Smoke pours out of Sydney's handbag. Everyone looks for the champagne cork but it's a silenced ACP Baby Browning pistol. Sydney has shot Trinity with a whisper-quiet silencer. THUB!

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I thought you never used one.

SYDNEY

Ah, the beauty of a silencer.

TRINITY

Why?

SYDNEY

Why the stomach? So I could watch you die. And because you killed my brother.

TRINITY

It was an accident.

SYDNEY

You're always having "accidents" Director. Call this another.

He slumps into a kneeling squat, mortally wounded.

RICHARD

You didn't really care about the fogging film.

SYDNEY

Oh, I cared enough, Richy. But I loved my brother.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR

I think we have our killers. Take them to the secure facility.

RICHARD

Yeah, call the cops. "Round up the usual suspects," hey Raul?

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR

This is the beginning of a very short relationship.

Trinity slides sideways, and keels over, dead.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR (CONT'D)

By the time they find your bodies they'll be so radioactive they'll have to dump them in the ocean in lead-lined barrels too. Fret not, I've heard from General Leslie Groves that it's a "very pleasant way to die."

Sydney sidles up to Richard looking remorseful.

SYDNEY

So long Richy. One last feel?

RICHARD

One last feel.

She slips her hand into his pants pocket and seems to be juggling. She kisses him softly. GUARDS club them from behind and Richard and Norm collapse.

INT. REACTOR ROOM - AREA IV - SSFL - CONTINUOUS

Knocked out by SECURITY GUARDS, Richard and Norm wake inside the reactor room, tied next to the core. They already look green around the gills.

RICHARD

Take some of these.

He manages to pass Norm the Iodine pills.

NORM

It's gonna be a long night,
brother. When did you know Darryl
was a swish?

RICHARD

When I saw the matching Longines
watches.

In the gloom, Norm and Richard search for a way out.

NORM

Since Manny ain't here and this is
probably the end of the road, tell
me about your cigarette case.

RICHARD

I was always breaking my knuckles
as a kid, defending myself against
bullies.

NORM

You?

RICHARD

Yeah, I was scrawny until I was
around 13.

NORM

No shit.

RICHARD

Shit. My Mum gave me some knuckle
dusters to protect my hands.

NORM

Some Mom. And she was OK with that?

RICHARD

OK with me defending myself. I had
red hair and all the dark, Italian
American kids used to pick on me
and beat me up.

NORM

My mom and grandma were the best.

RICHARD

When I was stationed in Nagasaki I
rescued a girl from some GIs and
her grateful father, a master
watchmaker, made me this. He said
my original was too clunky,
"bukiyona" or "Bukiyona seihin".

NORM

What was it like after the bombs?

RICHARD

Like walking through Hell. Even the insects were dead. No bugs, no birds. Everything was gone. No rats, flies, or mosquitoes.

NORM

I was humping supplies on Okinawa. Brothers weren't allowed to fight like y'all.

RICHARD

Japs would've whipped your sorry ass for sure.

NORM

I warrant!

They both crack up LAUGHING.

RICHARD

Groves, head of the Manhattan Project, tried to make out it was just a big thermal bomb, but people were dying of radiation weeks later. You'd walk into first aid stations and slip on the vomit and bloody diarrhea.

NORM

That's what's gonna happen to us.

RICHARD

Yes, delirium, coma, then death. You look as pale as me.

Norm is already ashen from the radiation exposure.

NORM

While we're at it, Lieutenant, what's up with that tiny, one-shot paratrooper's pistol you carry?

RICHARD

You mean this one?

Richard finesses the small pistol from his pocket.

NORM

Sydney slipped it to you.

RICHARD

We were flying photo reconnaissance over Tokyo during a fire-bombing raid. It was like a vision of Hades. March 10, 1945 -- we killed over 100,000 civilians. You could smell the burning flesh at thirty thousand feet. Le May stripped out all the machine guns and high explosives so we just dropped sticks of napalm.

NORM

Couldn't you just bomb the factories? I mean, all those people.

RICHARD

Factories were mixed among wooden houses. It wasn't like here, a lot of it was just tiny facilities in urban homes. Precision bombing was a waste of time so they turned to fire. After what the Japs did to the aircrews who bailed out I vowed never to be taken alive. Hence the one-shot pony here. Anything else since we're going to be dead in a few hours?

NORM

Yeah, stop treating your wife like a plantation concubine. Start treating all my sisters with respect.

This one hits Richard like a gamma-ray.

RICHARD

You're right. And you're fired.

NORM

Now, Lieutenant, how are you going to get this lovely black ass outta here?

Richard holds up a bullet.

NORM (CONT'D)

The bullet from Trinity. The wrong caliber.

Raul comes in, alone and carrying a Geiger Counter which is already crackling. He's wearing a protective one-piece suit.

RICHARD
No witnesses, that's smart.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR
Thanks, Lt. Charlton.

NORM
Not fast enough, hey?

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR
This'll speed things up. Otherwise,
you may take days.

Raul pulls the lever to activate the control rods and start the chain reaction.

CAPTAIN RAUL ESCOBAR (CONT'D)
If you were wondering how to scam
it, it's this lever.

RICHARD
You leave it with me, captain.

Richard quietly slips out the tiny paratrooper pistol.

NORM
Is that even going to fit?

RICHARD
In a pinch.

NORM
It's not even close, we're dead.

The slug, a slightly longer .45 caliber, looks like it's not nearly going to fit. Panic sets in.

RICHARD
It's a .45 ACP it'll fit.

NORM
It's a .45 long, it'll never fit.

He rams it in. It seems to fit. Then he can't close the bizarre 'sardine can' key to close the chamber.

Norm is ready to lose it as the bullet just won't twist in. Fear sets in - then finally a "click" as the slug rams home.

Raul suddenly gazes down as if he's seen the gun, but no. Richard can just see Raul's face past Norm's head.

NORM (CONT'D)
There's no line for the shot.

RICHARD
Do you love me?

NORM
No.

RICHARD
Do you trust me?

NORM
No.

RICHARD
Open your mouth.

Raul can be seen 30 feet away now through Norms' open mouth.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Wider.

Norm is like a great white Shark now. And shaking. The room is heating up and the men are nauseous from the gamma rays. Raul starts to leave. It's an impossible shot, with Raul high on a platform in the dim light. Norm tries to mumble.

NORM
Now, now!

BLAM! For a moment Raul seems to have cottoned on but the impossibility of it all makes him oblivious. It's so noisy he starts clawing at the rad suit looking for a hole.

RICHARD
I missed.

NORM
You never miss.

Raul slumps forward dead, pushing the control rods off. The reactor is scrammed and goes eerily quiet.

NORM (CONT'D)
That one's for Darryl.

Richard feverishly searches for some handcuff keys and manages to remove their shackles. They're both nauseous.

NORM (CONT'D)
We're still locked inside a nuclear reactor shed and I'm feeling sick.

RICHARD
Break the door down.

The door is solid. They try but it won't budge.

NORM

Hey, anyone out there! Help!

RICHARD

Help us. In here. It's LAPD!

The heavy door seems to groan open a sliver as a lock is released from outside. Finally, it moves. As Richard steps into the blinding dawn light, he accidentally kicks over a Kodak Starmatic at his feet. Smiling, he points it at Norm.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Say cheese. It's a good day to be alive.

NORM

That it is.

They both puke, deep and hard, and give each other the long, thankful embrace of the reprieved man and best friend.

EXT. RICHARD'S HOME - SILVERLAKE - DAY

A package sits on Richard and Vida's front porch. A female hand reaches down to unwrap it. It looks like a sack full of marshmallows. The note reads:

RICHARD (V.O.)

"My dearest Vida, you will always be my only Miss Atomic Bomb now and for the next ten thousand half years. I promise to treat you with respect, please forgive me, Richard."

EXT. RICHARD'S BACKYARD - SILVERLAKE - DAY

Close on a pair of white high-heeled shoes. The contrast is stunning as we pan up past a pair of stunning black legs and get closer, closer to the fun zone, and get a glimpse of some white fluff. It's not what you think. It's cotton wool.

Vida is wearing the Miss Atomic Bomb mushroom swimsuit. Richard is taking photos with the Kodak from Sydney. They're waxing merry from Manhattans. But Richard still looks grey.

VIDA

Richy-Rich, did I ever tell you I love you?

RICHARD
I believe you did Vida.

She slips him an Iodine tablet.

VIDA
And you know what I'll do to you if
you ever play with another one of
these (she holds up the kitten)
that ain't family, don't you?

RICHARD
Yes ma'am.

He leans out for a closed eye kiss but Vida pushes the kitten's mouth towards Richard's lips and we fade out.

EXT. WESTWOOD VETERAN'S CEMETERY - DAY

A heavy lead coffin is lowered and covered in concrete. It's a military send-off for Darryl. Richard, Norm, Manny, their WIVES, and Vida toss flowers into the grave.

Jane Legg is there too, shaky on her feet and holding Darryl's Marine dress cap. The flag is furled and presented to her by the Marine guard.

The headstone reads: "This grave, which was contaminated with long-life radioactive isotopes, cannot be moved from its location without the approval of the Atomic Energy Commission and the United States Energy Department."

At the back of the crowd stands Sydney, holding a pair of small white gloves. She waves a sad goodbye to Richard. Vida holds Richard's arm tightly and tips her head to acknowledge Sydney.

TEXT OVER BLACK:

In 1979, 20 years after the Sodium Reactor Experiment, students of Dan Hirsch at UCLA broke the SSFL story to the LA Times. Warren Olney and Channel 4 News then broadcasted the history of the Santa Susana Field Lab partial melt-down. The report also concluded that the SRE meltdown caused the release of more than 458 times the amount of radioactivity released by the Three Mile Island accident.

The site is now jointly owned by Boeing and NASA and as of today, the radioactivity is still being cleaned up.