

73. INT. MAX'S OFFICE - LATER

On the office console, the Network News Show has come to an end; the CLOSING THEME MUSIC emerges into SOUND, and the show's CREDITS begin to roll. MAX clicks off the set, folds his hands on the desk and sits glumly regarding his folded hands. After a moment, he becomes aware of another presence in the room and looks to the doorway where DIANA CHRISTENSON is standing, wearing a white blouse and dark slacks and carrying her jacket and purse. If we haven't already noticed how attractive she is, we do now -- standing as she is, framed in the doorway, backlit by the lights of the deserted common room, suddenly sensuous, even voluptuous.

DIANA

(entering the office)

Did you know there are a number of psychics working as licensed brokers on Wall Street?

(she sits across from MAX, fishes a cigarette out of her purse)

Some of them counsel their clients by use of Tarot cards. They're all pretty successful, even in a bear market and selling short. I met one of them a couple of weeks ago and thought of doing a show around her -- The Wayward Witch of Wall Street, something like that. But, of course, if her tips were any good, she could wreck the market. So I called her this morning and asked her how she was on predicting the future. She said she was occasionally prescient. "For example", she said, "I just had a fleeting vision of you sitting in an office with a craggy middle-aged man with whom you are or will be emotionally involved." And here I am.

MAX

She does all this with Tarot cards?

DIANA

No, this one operates on parapsychology. She has trance-like episodes and feels things in her energy field. I think this lady can be very useful to you, Max.

MAX

In what way?

DIANA

Well, you put on news shows, and here's someone who can predict tomorrow's news for you. Her name, aptly enough, is Sibyl. Sybil the Soothsayer. You could give her two minutes of trance at the end of a Howard Beale show, say once a week, Friday, which is suggestively occult, and she could oraculate. Then next week, everyone tunes in to see how good her predictions were.

MAX

Maybe she could do the weather.

DIANA

(smiles)

Your network news show is going to need some help, Max, if it's going to hold. Beale doesn't do the angry man thing well at all. He's too kvetchy. He's being irascible. We want a prophet, not a curmudgeon. He should do more apocalyptic doom. I think you should take on a couple of writers to write some jeremiads for him. I see you don't fancy my suggestions.

MAX

Hell, you're not being serious, are you?

DIANA

Oh, I'm serious. The fact is, I could make your Beale show the highest-rated news show in television, if you'd let me have a crack at it.

MAX

What do you mean, have a crack at it?

DIANA

I'd like to program it for you, develop it. I wouldn't interfere with the actual news. But teevee is show biz, Max, and even the News has to have a little showmanship.

MAX

My God, you are serious.

DIANA

I watched your six o'clock news today -- it's straight tabloid. You had a minute and a half on that lady riding a bike naked in Central Park. On the other hand, you had less than a minute of hard national and international news. It was all sex, scandal, brutal crimes, sports, children with incurable diseases and lost puppies. So I don't think I'll listen to any protestations of high standards of journalism. You're right down in the street soliciting audiences like the rest of us. All I'm saying is, if you're going to hustle, at least do it right. I'm going to bring this up at tomorrow's network meeting, but I don't like network hassles, and I was hoping you and I could work this out between us. That's why I'm here right now.

MAX

(sighs)

And I was hoping you were looking for an emotional involvement with a craggy middle-aged man.

DIANA

I wouldn't rule that out entirely.

They appraise each other for a moment; clearly, there are the possibilities of something more than a professional relationship here.

MAX

Well, Diana, you bring all your ideas up at the meeting tomorrow. Because, if you don't, I will. I think Howard is making a goddam fool of himself, and so does everybody Howard and I know in this industry. It was a fluke. It didn't work. Tomorrow, Howard goes back to the old format and this gutter depravity comes to an end.

DIANA

(smiles, stands)

Okay.

She leans forward to flick her ash into MAX's desk ash tray. Half-shaded as she is by the cone of light issuing from the desk lamp, it is nipple-clear she is bra-less, and MAX cannot help but note the assertive swells of her body. DIANA moves languidly to the door and would leave but MAX suddenly says:

MAX

I don't get it, Diana. You hung around till half-past seven and came all the way down here just to pitch a couple of loony show biz ideas when you knew goddam well I'd laugh you out of this office. I don't get it. What's your scam in this anyway?

DIANA moves back to the desk and crushes her cigarette out in the desk tray.

DIANA

Max, I don't know why you suddenly changed your mind about resigning, but I do know Hackett's going to throw you out on your ass in January. My little visit here tonight was just a courtesy made out of respect for your stature in the industry and because I've personally admired you ever since I was a kid majoring in speech at the University of Missouri. But sooner or later, now or in January, with or without you, I'm going to take over your network news show, and I figured I might as well start tonight.

MAX

I think I once gave a lecture at the University of Missouri.

DIANA

I was in the audience. I had a terrible schoolgirl crush on you for a couple of months.

She smiles, glides to the doorway again.

MAX

Listen, if we can get back for a moment to that gypsy who predicted all that about emotional involvements and middle-aged men -- what're you doing for dinner tonight?

DIANA pauses in the doorway, and then moves back briskly to the desk, picks up the telephone receiver, taps out a telephone number, waits for a moment --

DIANA

(on phone)
I can't make it tonight, luv,
call me tomorrow.

She returns the receiver to its cradle, looks at MAX;
their eyes lock.

MAX
Do you have any favorite
restaurant?

DIANA
I eat anything.

MAX
Son of a bitch, I get the
feeling I'm being made.

DIANA
You sure are.

MAX
I better warn you I don't do
anything on the first date.

DIANA
We'll see.

She moves for the door. MAX stares down at his desk.

MAX
(mutters)
Schmuck, what're you getting into?

He sighs, stands, flicks off his desk lamp.