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. . . That night Roger Talbot left Bully's early so he could catch the evening news shows. He guessed Jane had caught the basics of the fire for her online story, but it was Jake's house, and he knew that changed everything.

Hollywood Now! opened with the sound of electronic drums pulsating over aerial footage of flames consuming the beach house. A sultry woman's voice rose above the music. "Hades' fire reached for mysterious hunk Jake Truland today." The music surged. "The flames spared Truland's soul, but not his lavish Del Mar beach mansion." A fanfare worthy of Nero's entrance to Rome filled the speakers. "I'm Tammy Bandita and this is *Hollywood Now!*"

Images of celebrities on red carpet and probing searchlights swirled across the screen. "You're here, *now*," a deep male voice proclaimed, "behind the scenes of the most glamorous place on Earth, Culver City, California, just a stone's throw and a martini swirl from Hollywood...."

The camera swished from a view of a palm tree to a tight shot of

Tammy Bandita at the anchor desk, her hair blown slightly by unseen winds, a hint of cleavage glowing.

“Jake Truland is alive this morning—but just barely. A fire that started under...sas-spi-shuss circumstances”—she drew out the word “suspicious,” a slight lisp adding an alluring tone—“devastated Truland’s beautiful beachfront mansion.” She paused, a moment’s breath. “The same beautiful mansion *Hollywood Now!* showed you *exclusively* six months ago.”

Cut to video of Truland’s patio six months ago, with the Swedish deck chairs and the Philippe Starck–designed suntan lotion table.

“Now it is nothing more than a burning mass of broken dreams.” Cut to video of the patio in flames.

Another swish and the camera was back on Tammy in the studio. Pausing, she turned her left shoulder toward the camera, letting her blouse dip a millimeter. “*Hollywood Now!* has learned San Diego County officials believe something is very weird about this case.” Like magic, a graphic appeared over her right shoulder, superimposing an old promo picture of Truland over a blurry shot of the smoldering fire, with the headline in dripping red letters, “Truland’s Hell.” She paused and raised her left eyebrow. “Stay tuned to *Hollywood Now!* for *exclusive* details on Truland’s hot tragedy.”

Roger was enthralled. She made “exclusive details” sound like a whispered invitation in a dark bar moments after last call.