

GOODNIGHT, LADIES & AMERICANS!

EP 101: THE INTERN & THE JESTER

Written by

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A black screen.

We hear the commotion of a newsroom soundstage:

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (V.O.)

Are we set?

STAGE MANAGER (V.O.)

20 seconds.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (V.O.)

Brennan?

BRENNAN (V.O.)

What?

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (V.O.)

Set?

BRENNAN (V.O.)

(Reading through papers)

Yeah! Yeah, I'm just looking
through, um...

MITCH (V.O.)

Need any help there, buddy?

BRENNAN (V.O.)

(reading)

Well, they're your jokes,
"buddy-"

ASSISTANT S.M. (V.O.)

10 seconds.

BRENNAN (V.O.)

-wanna recite them to me?

MITCH (V.O.)

What was that?

BRENNAN (V.O.)

Do you want to recite them to me?

MITCH (V.O.)

Um... "knock, knock."

BRENNAN (V.O.)

(unamused)

Okay.

(to the E.P.)

We're set!

STAGE MANAGER (V.O.)

Five... four... three... two!

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (V.O.)

Here we go, people!

With that, Our TITLE...

GOODNIGHT, LADIES & AMERICANS!

Then...

The screen illuminates with a colorful "FOX NEWS" intro. It's a tad static, as if shown on an early 2000s TV.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

You are watching "The O'Donnell
Briefing," the most respected name
in news. Fox News Channel!

I./E. FOX NEWS - TV FOOTAGE - 2008

We cut to live footage of FOX NEWS Network's "*The O'Donnell Briefing*." Headlines and graphics sit at the bottom screen. BRENNAN O'DONNELL (Late 50s/Early 60s), with a smug pout on his cracked lips, sits center frame.

He fronts a slick set, with all overly patriotic lighting.

BRENNAN

Evening folks. Personal report
tonight: Big-time comedian and
liberal "pied piper--"

Mitch's chuckle is heard faintly over Brennan out of frame. Clips of Mitch on "*GLA*" play to the side of Brennan's face.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

-to his band of fellow, comic
players on the hit comedy show,
"*Goodnight Ladies & Americans with
Mitchell Madison*--" this is
Mitchell Madison! As you know,
Mitch has appeared on the program
several times before, battling in
our several "bouts," discussing
topics of politics, economics,
media, and social well-

The static news coverage abruptly-- CUTS TO BLACK.

We hear a muffled, echoing voice rise over the dark screen.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

(echoing)

Mitch...

(Still muffled)

Mitch...?

(loud & clear)

Mitch!

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA

MITCHELL MADISON- aka "MITCH" -snaps to attention, looking like he'd been lost in a dream. His attention is now on Brennan, sitting opposite across a slick, white table.

Though no longer seeing it through a TV broadcast, we are still on the live set of "The O'Donnell Briefing."

MITCH

I'm sorry, what was that?

BRENNAN

(dramatizing)

I'd asked you: "As of now... what does 'the' Mitchell Madison think the biggest problem with our country is?"

Mitch pauses at the question... then bursts into laughter.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

What is it, Mitch?

MITCH

Um... Pass.

BRENNAN

Okay... how's about this: "Secret War against the American News Media."

MITCH

Who's?

BRENNAN

Yours.

Mitch chuckles. He looks around the soundstage jokingly.

MITCH

(playfully)

What? Who snitched?

Brennan grabs a stack of notes from the table, violently shuffling them. He reads:

BRENNAN

Quote: "Not just 'A' tragic American embarrassment, but 'THE' tragic American embarrassment."
Another one: "A flat-tired bicycle wheel of cyclical, corporate, and corrupted laziness."

MITCH
...kind of wordy-

BRENNAN
Oh, this ones my favorite-
(reads)
"The state of America's streamlined news coverage is that of a teenage boy with a fat pimple on his nose. But, instead of dealing with it medically and practically, he poses it to his buddies as 'battle wounds' from a parking lot brawl with Chuck Norris and then passes that along as fact-" where do you come up with this stuff, Mitch?

MITCH
I promise you, that one was a lot funnier in the editing brief. I'll take that blame.

BRENNAN
For all of them? Your doing?

MITCH
No. Just the one.

Mitch smiles and gives a slight glance off camera.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - OFF CAMERA - SAME TIME

Mitch's eyes latch onto WILLIAM "BILLY" AGNEW (Mid 50s), GLA's lead producer/show-runner and Mitch's life-long friend. He wears a slick, three-piece suit.

Billy smirks back at Mitch, then looks down at the phone in his hands, a brand new iPhone 3GS.

He texts a contact by the name, "GINA," as we hear the interview continue in the background:

GINA (TEXT)
How's he doing???

BRENNAN (O.S.)
In regards to you're "war on the press-"

BILLY (TEXT)
Just started. Where's the team?

MITCH (O.S.)
Wait, I thought it was on the media-?

BRENNAN
 Show's title could've fooled me:
 "with Mitchell Madison..." in those
 sloppy, fat letters.

Slight pause. Mitch cringes at Brennan.

MITCH
 Did you just fat-shame letters-?

BRENNAN
 You know, there's a controversy
 around your title?

MITCH
 I think it's EB Garmond font-?

BRENNAN
 Did you know that, Mitch?

Pause. Mitch stops dodging.

MITCH
 What? That there's a controversy-?

BRENNAN
 "Goodnight, Ladies & Americans."
 Isn't that a bit exclusive?

Mitch doesn't defend. He gives Brennan a puzzled look.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)
 Few of our lady staff members don't
 like it. Mm-mm... not one bit. What
 would you tell them, Mitch?

MITCH
 About my show's... title?

BRENNAN
 Yes! What would you tell them?

MITCH
 Well... first, I'd direct them to
 the one who came up with it: our
 head writer, Regina Little- you've
 met her-

BRENNAN
 Lovely women.

MITCH
 Isn't she the best-?! Great mom-
 You know what she would tell them?

BRENNAN

What?

Mitch leans in, excited for his comeback.

MITCH

She would tell them: make the slightest effort to stop at a Books-a-Million on the way home tonight, purchase a dictionary, and look up the word "irony."

Beat. Brennan glances off camera.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - OFF CAMERA - SAME TIME

Brennan locks eyes with the EP, now standing close to Billy's side. Brennan nods at her. She nods back and whispers into her headset's mic. Billy watches.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

That's a "go" for the headline.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA - SAME TIME

Brennan lets out a chuckling, but disappointed sigh. Mitch gives him a devilish, child-like smirk.

BRENNAN

Okay... okay. Mitch...

MITCH

Uh, oh...

BRENNAN

Mitch, let's-

MITCH

(still smirking)

Did I just break someone's heart?

Brennan leans over the table. Picture a Dad about to give his son a scolding. Surprisingly, his voice sounds gentle:

BRENNAN

Now... Mitch, you're aware that, in spite of all my... efforts, in spite of all my "comments" of you, public discourse- you know -I actually like you-

Mitch chuckles.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

No joke, Mitch. I do. I like you very much.

(beat)

But...

MITCH

Here we go.

BRENNAN

(over-dramatic)

Three evenings ago. On your program, you had given a certain... I don't know- the term...

MITCH

A "cold open?"

BRENNAN

A cold open- right! A monologue. And in that monologue, to put it mildly, you had a few words to say in regards to... me.

Mitch smirks, already feeling ahead of Brennan's plan.

MITCH

Oh, don't be selfish.

BRENNAN

Well, the network as whole- but I certainly was not excluded! Acknowledging our reporting of the Sarah Laughton trial held last week before the Supreme Court.

Brennan holds a beat of silence. Mitch's smirk makes his blood boil. Then, with a fake smile...

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

So! Let's talk about it.

MITCH

Okay... duel at dawn, my friend.

BRENNAN

No, no, no, Mitch. How's about, for the folks at home, we nip this in the bud here and now. We debate this as we really are. Like gentlemen. Like "pals."

Mitch laughs at "pals."

BRENNAN (CONT'D)
What's so funny, Mitch?

MITCH
Where do you wanna start... "pal?"

CUT TO BLACK.

Over the black screen, in writing:

CHAPTER ONE: The Intern & the Jester

Then, more text:

Three days earlier...

EST. NEW YORK CITY - MORNING - THREE DAYS EARLIER

We glide across the winter-time glaze of a morning sunrise striking Midtown Manhattan.

EXT. GLA STUDIOS - MORNING

The morning sun strikes the side of the GLA studio HQ.

The corner building's exterior is covered in show logos, photos of Mitch, and photos of the whole cast.

A larger, older man- HOWARD (late 60s) -approaches the building's front, glass doors. He uses a key card to let himself in.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - OFFICES - MOMENTS LATER

We follow Howard as he enters and switches on the lights to all main sectors of GLA's backstage offices.

A sea of desks and dividers are illuminated. Some staff-members still sit at their stations, asleep and covered in their own drool.

Howard passes an individual office with a large window by its door, blinds closed. A light behind the blinds suddenly pops on. The office door swinging open. Lugging herself out the door: RORY GUERRERO (Early 30s), senior writer and show-anchor. She messily yawns, wearing a baggy "Columbia" sweater with pajama bottoms and slippers.

We continue with Howard.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - SOUNDSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

LIGHTS UP in the studio's soundstage, revealing Mitch's iconic desk and set to no other than "Goodnight, Ladies & Americans!"

The show logo sits at the center of the desk with neon red and blue under-lighting.

Behind the desk: a colorful, slick backdrop of New York City's sky-line.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - HOWARD'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

At last, Howard reaches his tiny office at the back of the soundstage.

It's covered in piles of papers, old cue-cards, and show posters. He sprawls out in a rolling chair behind a desk. While taking a sip of his coffee, he switches on a little TV at his side.

The TV illuminates to the CNN's morning "*Breaking News.*"

The story? Of course, the Sarah Laughton trial.

I/E. CAR - NEW JERSEY - MORNING

REGINA "GINA" LITTLE (Late 30s), GLA's Head Writer, drives towards her 10 year old son's elementary school. The news plays on the radio as she pulls into the drop-off zone.

REPORTER (O.S.)

"...3 days of remained pause by the Supreme Court and a community still left in disarray. Another settlement, turned delay, to staff-sergeant Sarah Laughton's civil suit against the US Military-"

Her son, OTIS (8 years old), sits in the seat next to her. He wears a large winter jacket, reading an "Adventures of Tintin" book.

Regina pulls into the drop-off zone. She puts the car in park as Otis puts his book in his backpack.

REGINA

And when teacher says "Otis, put your book away," what do you-?

OTIS
But Uncle Billy gave-?

REGINA
Wrong. You put it away. Repeat it
back to me.

OTIS
(annoyed)
I put it away...

REGINA
That's right, now give me a kiss
and get your butt there.

Otis gives his mom a kiss. He pushes open the car door,
dangles his little legs out, and hops from the car.

OTIS
Love you, mommy.

REGINA
Love you too, baby. Daddy will pick
you up this afternoon.

He shuts the door behind him.

Regina looks back to the radio and turns up the volume, high.

I/E. CAR - NEW YORK CITY - LATER

Regina drives across a bridge overlooking the skyline of
downtown Manhattan. Now wearing her work glasses, she listens
to the morning broadcast. She mumbles unreadable words to
herself as she listens, likely possible jokes.

REPORTER (O.S.)
"-Formerly known as Jacob Laughton
prior to a surgery-based
transition. Laughton's previous
verdict for the manslaughter of
former, Private Ron Lancaster..."

She focuses on the road, when:

DING DING

Regina's phone lights up for a text notification. It's from a
contact named "*Big Bills (Billy)*." It reads:

BILLY (TEXT)
*New cold-open's ready to go. Locked
 final draft. Only needs a a brief
 editing pass. Mitch's call. "*

REGINA
 (to self)
 What the...?

She texts back, trying to keep her eyes on the road at the same time:

REGINA (TEXT) (CONT'D)
*I haven't approved. Who's draft?
 Finch?*

She waits for a response. Then...

BILLY (TEXT)
Just come in. ASAP

REGINA
 (to self)
 ...the fuck?

HOOOONK--

--REGINA SWERVES OUT THE MIDDLE OF TWO LANES. A car speeds around her, angrily honking.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - OFFICE ENTRANCE

Billy, now in a different three piece suit- with an additional coat, scarf, and briefcase -briskly walks through the main office doors.

MAGGIE (Early 20s), studio secretary, perks up at her desk. She ignores Rory, still in her pajamas, pestering Maggie for some time now. Rory's attention immediately snaps to Billy.

RORY
 So, who's the fuckin winner, Billy?

BILLY
 Morning, Maggie.

Billy moves to a nearby table to make a cup of coffee.

MAGGIE
 Good morning, Mr. Agnew.

RORY
 The winner, Billy?

Billy ignores her. A security guard passes by.

SECURITY GUARD

Mr. Agnew.

BILLY

Morning, Jim.

RORY

Billy!

Billy focuses on his coffee, but humors Rory.

BILLY

What?

RORY

Do you know of the last person who skirt past a full day in the writer's room, only to solo-premiere an entire cold-open?

BILLY

Are you actually asking?

RORY

No one! It's fuckin rhetorical, Billy, because no one fuckin does that-!

BILLY

You know, to some people, I think saying "good morning" has become redundant.

RORY

Billy.

BILLY

I still like to hear it.

(to Rory)

Did you sleep here?

RORY

Yeah.

BILLY

I thought I'd seen that shirt... it's got a smudge.

Rory looks at her sweater. She sees it.

RORY
 (to herself)
 Shit.

BILLY
 Maggie, question: how long's Rory
 been bothering you, waiting for me?

RORY
 (to Maggie)
 Don't answer that.

MAGGIE
 30 minutes, Mr. Agnew.

Billy finishes making his coffee.

BILLY
 Second question, Maggie: Should I
 fire her?

RORY
 (to Maggie)
 Don't answer-

MAGGIE
 Yes, Mr. Agnew.

BILLY
 I'll start her with some starch for
 that smudge, but I'll take it into
 consideration. Thanks, Maggie!

Billy walks to his office, Rory pushes herself off Maggie's
 desk and follows.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

They walk and talk through the winding desks and offices,
 just as we'd seen Howard do earlier:

RORY
 So, who's the winner?

Billy jolts at the sound of her voice, spilling a bit of his
 coffee.

BILLY
 (re: the spill)
 Not me?

RORY

Is it Finch? He's been dry the past few weeks.

BILLY

(fed-up)

No- Rory, you a made spill my- Finch is fine if he can get around his ego and write a joke once in a while, but why do you keep saying "winner?"

RORY

Cuz next time I try at the Powerball, I'm cutting off this fucker's foot to keep.

Billy gives Rory a disgusted look.

RORY (CONT'D)

Like a rabbit...

BILLY

(pause)

What?

RORY

You know, like a rabbits... foot... thing- it's in Mission Impossible 3.

BILLY

Rory-!

Rory tries hopping in front of Billy for his attention. She walks backwards.

RORY

(rambling)

So, that's it? Live audience through the doors in 5-ish hours, Mitch is M.I.A., the whole crew is asking for a shooting script to our opener- which I don't have since I didn't fuckin write it -and I don't know what to fuckin tell them beyond this mysterious fuckin "winner" shit and I don't--

BILLY (CONT'D)

Rory...?

(he waits)

Rory...

(he still waits...)

BILLY (CONT'D)

--Rory! One: enough. Two: editing
brief in two hours. Don't bother me
inbetween.

He tries to get past her. Rory continues following him
anyway.

RORY

But Gina leads those, not you.

BILLY

Last time I checked, I lead Gina...

RORY

Does she know about the-?

Billy shakes his phone in the air, gaining ahead of Rory.

RORY (CONT'D)

Don't you think this is the
slightest bit of miscommunication?
With Mitch not here and everything
already finalized last minute,
how're we-?

BILLY

I'm trying my best, Rory! New
script's in everyone's inbox. I
need you to let Atticus know.

Rory stops, letting Billy finally pass, calling out to him as
he leaves.

RORY

Finch's on his pull-out. Even the
"Wiz Kid" sleeps.

BILLY

(mumbled)

Not when he hears about this...

RORY

What was that?

BILLY

Nothing. Now, go!

RORY

Where is Mitch, by the-?!

Billy doesn't look back as he answers.

BILLY
Go wake Finch!

RORY
And when he asks for the spit-fuck
who wrote this, what do I tell him?

Billy ignores her and continues walking.

EXT. GLA STUDIOS

A yellow cab swerves and parks just out front the building.

A young man exits the cab wearing a nice suit and a pair of ratty VANS high-tops. A backpack hangs over his shoulder. He looks up at the studio and sighs over a timid smile. This is JEMAL- "J" - WILSON (Age 19), Rory's so-called "winner."

He approaches the front glass door. It's locked. Jemal knocks.

Another younger guy pushing a mail-cart notices him. He looks happy to see Jemal's face. He runs to open the door for him.

MAIL GUY
J? What're you doing here, man?

JEMAL
(lying)
Um... got a call to come by. I
think I probably just forgot
something over the summer.

MAIL GUY
And that's why you wore a suit?

Jemal freezes, caught in that act. His friend smiles.

MAIL GUY (CONT'D)
Come on in.

INT. GLA STUDIO - OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

An iPhone (another 3Gs) sits atop the wrinkled sheets of a pull-out couch.

"Wouldn't It Be Nice" by The Beach Boys begins to play as the phone screen illuminates for an alarm. The sheets under the phone begin to ruffle. A hand appears and rips the covers off, revealing ATTICUS ROSS (24 years old)- or "FINCH" (yes, because of that) -GLA writer and popular anchor.

The sheets accidentally fling the phone across the room. Atticus watches it fly.

CRASH-- the phone strikes a glass frame in the side corner by his desk. It shatters and falls to the ground. The Beach Boys doesn't stop.

Atticus lays his head back into the thin mattress and sighs.

He sits up and wipes his eyes, revealing his usual night attire: sweatpants, golf socks, a U.S. ARMY t-shirt, and dog-tags around his neck. He puts on a pair of glasses sitting at the side of his pillow.

He rises and walks himself to the shattered frame. Inside the frame sits an old newspaper from the New York Times:

"WIZ KID, ATTICUS ROSS: THE YOUNGEST FACE ON GLA AND DON'T WORRY... HE'S HERE TO STAY."

Atticus removes his phone and some of the glass. He mutters:

ATTICUS
That's an omen...

DING DING

An email notification lights up his laptop-- from Billy.

Atticus, drops the paper, sits at his desk and reads.

The subject line: *****LOCKED COLD-OPEN FRIDAY SHOOT.**

Atticus sits up in his chair. An attached document sits under the subject. He clicks the tab and begins to skim it.

KNOCK KNOCK

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
Yeah.

Rory enters, lingering in the open door frame of the office.

RORY
Mornin, Finch.

Atticus keeps his eyes on the laptop.

ATTICUS
Unless there's a coffee, a joint,
or an eclair in your hands, I'm
gonna ask you to leave.

RORY
Is this "The Beach Boys?"

Atticus peaks from his laptop at Rory. He forgot the alarm was still going. He turns it off.

ATTICUS
Your hands. Let me get a look.

Rory shows them: empty.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
Yep, that's what I thought. Fuck off.

RORY
You listen to "The Beach Boys?"

ATTICUS
"Wouldn't It Be Nice." Pet Sounds Album. 1966.

RORY
So?

Atticus stands from his desk, stepping in Rory's direction.

ATTICUS
So, yes. I like good harmonies.

RORY
You wear golf socks to sleep?

He does. Atticus stands in front of the door. Rory steps back a little into the door frame.

ATTICUS
Do you only speak in questions?

RORY
Do you-?

He slams the door in Rory's face. He waits for a second and reopens it. Rory remains in the door frame, scowling.

ATTICUS
Okay, so I have woken up. This isn't a- um... right: nightmare.

RORY
Do you wear them when you fuck, too?

ATTICUS
What do you want?

RORY
That's weird, man-

ATTICUS
Rory!

Atticus moves to his desk.

RORY
I liked your last field piece!

ATTICUS
It was a guest sketch and it was
three weeks ago. Don't be awkward.

RORY
Can you please let me encourage you
when you're in a dry spell...

Atticus returns most of his attention to his laptop.

ATTICUS
It's not a dry spell, I'm just...
tired, that's all.

RORY
I was trying to be nice, but you're
only 24. You can't claim
performance issues yet.

ATTICUS
You're fucking with me, why, again?

RORY
Boss-Man sent me. Read his email?

ATTICUS
New cold-open.

Rory closes the door behind her.

RORY
Have any thoughts?

Atticus scans the document more thoroughly and doesn't answer
back.

RORY (CONT'D)
Finch?

Atticus still focuses on the document.

RORY (CONT'D)
Wiz Kid, where you at right now?

Atticus gives a cross look at the paper. Rory picks up a pillow from his pull-out and throws it at him.

RORY (CONT'D)
What's the verdict, sock-fucker?

She completely misses. Atticus doesn't acknowledge the pillow, but:

ATTICUS
(to himself)
Where's the punch-line?

RORY
Okay "sock-fucker's" on the nose,
but-

ATTICUS
No- no-

He turns the laptop screen towards her.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
There's no punchline- there's no...
jokes, really. It builds, builds,
builds, builds, then like... What
is this?

RORY
I guess an op-ed?

Rory leans in attempt to read the screen.

ATTICUS
No, "How can my cat's litter give
me HPV?" is an op-ed. That?

He points at the screen.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
That looks like a slander piece.

RORY
Dude, all we do here are slander
pieces.

Atticus turns the screen back, stealing Rory's chance to read. He goes silent as his focuses more into the piece.

ATTICUS
Not with out a punchline, we don't.
What's Mitch up to?

RORY
Is it good?

ATTICUS
Huh?

RORY
Is it any good?

ATTICUS
I- I told you-

RORY
You told me you thought it didn't
have any punchlines or whatever...
you didn't say if it was any good-

ATTICUS
(realizing)
Who's work is this?

It hits Rory.

RORY
Actually... um... that's the thing?

ATTICUS
What thing-? What's the thing?

KNOCK KNOCK

Atticus sighs at the knocking.

RORY
Come in.

Maggie calls from behind the door.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
(muffled)
It's not your office, Rory.

ATTICUS
Fuck off.

The door opens anyway. Maggie enters.

MAGGIE
Edit meeting in two hours, Finch.

ATTICUS

Yep.

RORY

Wait, Billy told me-

MAGGIE

Billy also keeps reminding you to shower when you sleep here.

RORY

Okay... Mags, you ever think if Billy saw who you really were around the rest of us you'd get fired?

MAGGIE

Nope.

Atticus sits up from his seat. He notices something on the file. He moves closer to his laptop screen.

RORY

Why's that?

MAGGIE

Seeing you come in every morning is fucking prime job security.

ATTICUS

(quietly)

Rory?

RORY

You do know that I'm actually overqualified for this job, right?

MAGGIE

Because sweatpants and a need for a shower just screams "Liberal, Harvard Elite."

ATTICUS

Rory.

RORY

Columbia, mind you, and who paired me with "liberal?"

MAGGIE

Literally every part about you.

ATTICUS

Rory!

Rory and Maggie turn to him.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
Who's "J. Wilson?"

RORY
Who?

Atticus flips the laptop around, again.

ATTICUS
It's tagged at the bottom of the
piece: "J. Wilson."

Maggie's eyes widen.

MAGGIE
Oh...

ATTICUS
"Oh..." what?

A familiar voice washes over the scene.

BRENNAN (PRE-LAP)
So he's a mystery.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA - PRESENT DAY

We're back in the interview of "The O'Donnell Briefing." Once again, Mitch suddenly sits himself up as if he were not listening to Brennan.

MITCH
Who?

BRENNAN
Your poetic, "author," so to speak.
The cold-open writer. Not you?

MITCH
Nope.

BRENNAN
How about your team? One of them?

Mitch doesn't respond.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)
Ah-ha! Actually, touching on that,
why don't we get the rundown of
your "team," Mitch...

Brennan reads off of his notes once again.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

...one-by-one: Regina Little. As you've mentioned, head writer. Previous and temporary team member from a little down the road at 30 Rock. Leno. Fired under a year for "inefficiency" and "low professionalism," at least as these old reports say.

MITCH

(sarcastic)

Is that what it says.

BRENNAN

Yes. A problem?

The playfulness starts to wash out from Mitch's face. He doesn't have a remark back for Brennan. Brennan looks up from his pages and notices.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

Nothing?

(pause)

Okay. Rory Gu- Rory, Gue- what is...

MITCH

Guerrera.

BRENNAN

Right. Columbia grad- nice. Ex-writer for the New York Times- nice. Then quits to pursue careers in comedy, despite serious lack of accredited experience- yikes...

Mitch clenches, but keeps his confident composure.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

Atticus Ross. The public's favorite "rookie maverick" to political comedy. Cuts college for the military and discharges immediately from basic- ouch. Then finds... you. "The Wiz Kid." Named the youngest political comedian by Time magazine after his GLA debut... 3 years ago? Time flies.

MITCH

Sometimes.

BRENNAN

Then there's Winston- Winston...?
wait, actually I don't know this
one-

Mitch ends Brennan's parade. Brennan reshuffles his papers.

MITCH

Look, are you done?

BRENNAN

I just want to know who wrote the
"cold-open," Mitch.

MITCH

Why?

BRENNAN

Well, there were some words for me-

MITCH

-for your network-

BRENNAN

"-indulging" me, therefore, I
believe I'm obliged to retort.

MITCH

And I'm not stopping you. Go for
it.

BRENNAN

It's not for you, Mitch. Because,
apparently, you didn't write it.

MITCH

But I did say it on national TV.
I'm the face of those words, so
let's talk about it.

Brennan buys in on Mitch's request, sitting back in his chair
and letting go of the papers.

BRENNAN

Okay.

(pause)

Jacob Laughton-

MITCH

(correcting)

Sarah Laughton.

BRENNAN

Right.

(moving on)

Two trials: manslaughter and a civil suit against the US Military. Every news service on the planet erupts, and then what? We just... don't? FOX News decides to dance past this entirely.

MITCH

No.

Brennan points violently at Mitch.

BRENNAN

That's what you said. That's what you claimed, Mitch-

MITCH

No. I said you called her a "treasonous pig" and a "murderer."

BRENNAN

Nope. Excuse me, but no, because that... that's not true-

MITCH

Which part? Because that's absolutely true. When Sarah Laughton was tried for manslaughter, out of self-defense of a planned hate crime by her fellow marksmen, the evidence sat properly under review. But, what did you call her in the mean time?

Now Mitch has sat up. The two lean over the table in a tense stand-off with each other.

BRENNAN

Media compliance to a violent case, especially in our military, is inevitable for some "heat." You know that-

MITCH

"A murderer." You called her "a murderer." Then, her verdict concluded innocence: she was a victim and not a perpetrator. FOX News? Radio silence...

BRENNAN

That's unfair-

MITCH

Nope. Because then three remaining attackers are set free, no-charge, traded on the grounds that she is not convicted of manslaughter. Military then strips all titles and benefits of solely her through a dishonorable discharge... the grounds of her current civil case. You and I both know that was naturally bound to happen.

BRENNAN

Correct.

MITCH

So what did you call her then?

BRENNAN

"The Prosecution." Just like every-

MITCH

No. No- your boys downstairs called her an "ungrateful, treasonous pig." That's a quote! Then she's assumed to win appeal. What does FOX have to say?

(pause)

Nothing. Nothing.

BRENNAN

What about your network, Mitch.

MITCH

Sorry?

BRENNAN

Your show. Your network.

MITCH

Yeah... what about it?

Brennan looks right to the camera.

BRENNAN

Let's run the clip--

CLIP MONTAGE

We now see a montage of footage from different comedy specials and TV shows belonging to Mitch's network.

They each seem to have a running theme: absurdity, stupidity, vulgarity, etc. We even see veteran comedians such as Chappelle, Burr, Rock, Seinfeld, Sandler, and, of course, Mitch. Each clip containing jokes about bodily functions, penises, farts, sexual humor, etc. Jokes that, out of context, can easily be misinterpreted as "foul."

We cut back to the interview.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA

Mitch laughs from some of the jokes in the montage. Brennan looks at him like he were a child.

BRENNAN

So... just remember, with any words that you have for us and our people- our network. That's yours, Mitch. All of "that."

MITCH

What?

BRENNAN

You heard me.

MITCH

No, I- I did. And I know- I just don't see the point.

Brennan moves on, ignoring Mitch's confusion.

BRENNAN

But perhaps you can't be funny without your rag-tag team, huh? Not here at least.

MITCH

Well, this is your show. Perhaps that's a question for your team-

BRENNAN

My team is a composite of aged, experienced journalists, Mitch.

(MORE)

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

Not "The Breakfast Club." I guess youthful spirit is nice now and then, but not in an adult conversation. You understand that, don't you?

Beat.

Mitch laughs to himself. Brennan notices.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

MITCH

Nah- it's nothing.

BRENNAN

What is it?

MITCH

Your underestimate is just funny to me, that's it.

BRENNAN

My underestimate of what? You?

MITCH

No.

BRENNAN

Then who?

Slight pause as Mitch thinks.

MITCH

"Youthful spirit."

INT. GLA STUDIOS - OFFICE ENTRANCE - THREE DAYS EARLIER

The slight patter of a foot echoes in the quiet waiting area at the entrance of GLA's back offices. Maggie continues to work at her desk. She notices the patter coming from the only taken chair in the room.

The rubber heel to a familiar pair of VANS "pat-pat-pats" on the floor. They belong to Jemal, sitting stiff in the chair.

Jemal looks across the room at a TV in the corner of the ceiling: an ABC report on the suspected verdict of Sarah Laughton's case. Suddenly, Jemal's foot stops tapping.

Maggie pauses from her work and looks over at Jemal.

MAGGIE

Would you like a coffee or anything?

JEMAL

Oh, no. No, I'm fine. Thank you.

MAGGIE

Mr. Agnew will be out in a minute. He's not one to be late. The office today is just a bit... sorry.

JEMAL

All good. I don't mind- I've no where to... yeah.

Slight pause. They look at each other, unsure of what to say. Then:

MAGGIE

I remember when you interned here... I don't know if... we didn't really, interact... I'm not sure if you know who...

JEMAL

"Maggie," right?

MAGGIE

Yeah.

JEMAL

I always liked the South Park figures you kept on your desk. And that they were all just Kenny?

They still line her desk. She blushes and adjusts one.

MAGGIE

Oh... thanks.

(slight pause)

I like your shoes...

Jemal looks down at his VANS, slightly embarrassed of how ragged they are. He goes to introduce himself:

JEMAL

By the way, I'm- um... I'm-

Billy enters from the studio offices.

BILLY

Jemal?

Jemal shoots up from the waiting chair. Billy waves for him to follow.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Walk with me, would ya?

INT. GLA STUDIO - OFFICE FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Rory, now freshly showered and in new clothes, leans on a vacant desk. She sips a small cup of coffee, watching an ABC report- the same report Jemal had been watching.

She burns her tongue, spilling some coffee on herself. A random crew member passes her.

CREW MEMBER
Nice, Rory.

RORY
Don't you have something to light?

CREW MEMBER
Don't you have anything to write?

RORY
Yes, shithead, just not for...

Across the room, Billy and Jemal enter. Rory sees them in the corner of her eye, spilling more of her coffee.

RORY (CONT'D)
...today.

Coming from the same direction, showered and changed, enters Atticus. He's speed walking, charging towards Billy.

Rory plops down her coffee and dashes towards Atticus.

She intercepts him and tugs him back. Atticus doesn't fight it. They stop and talk in the middle of the office commotion.

RORY (CONT'D)
What the fuck are you doing?

ATTICUS
I'm going to talk to Billy?

RORY
Didn't you see who he's with?

Atticus gives a quick glance where the two were headed. They're now gone.

ATTICUS
(sarcastic)
What a coincidence this is...

RORY
What a petty bitch you are.

ATTICUS
An intern?! A fuckin intern! You're saying this doesn't piss you off?

RORY
I'm saying whatever you could possibly have to whine about, remember, this is Billy: EP, show-runner, check writer, and fucking great logistical debtor.

ATTICUS
Meaning?

RORY
He's in charge so... shut up?

Atticus begins to charge again. Rory stops him.

RORY (CONT'D)
Shut up, and trust him I might add.

ATTICUS
I knew something was weird when Billy started managing the script. He never does that, he always leaves that to Mitch. But, apparently much is changing today, so when I get replaced, it's not going to be on the grounds of "trust-"

RORY
Replacing-? No one's getting replaced.

ATTICUS
No?

RORY
I haven't heard anything.

ATTICUS
You usually don't.

RORY

I'm sure it's easier for Billy to cut and replace a piece of writing than a whole staff-writer, Finch-

Beat. Atticus' eyes widen. It hits him.

RORY (CONT'D)

-so drop the fuckin paranoia, okay?

ATTICUS

Excuse me.

Atticus turns around, leaving in the opposite direction.

RORY

Where are you going now?

ATTICUS

I'm going to the War Room.

RORY

Why?

ATTICUS

I need to write. Edit.

RORY

On what-

It hits her.

RORY (CONT'D)

Wait, wait, wait- No! It's locked, you can't just- ego-fuckin-maniac-!

Regina, now finally having made it to the office, enters. She charges towards Billy's office, passing Rory.

REGINA

Morning.

Rory sees the fury on her face.

RORY

Gina?

REGINA

Finch, where you headed?

ATTICUS

War Room. You?

REGINA

Billy's.

ATTICUS

Yyyyep.

RORY

Oh, for fuck sakes- Gina!

Rory dashes after a Regina, leaving Atticus.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - BILLY'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Billy enters his office, walking straight to the seat of his desk.

Jemal remains by the open door, not entirely sure what to do.

Billy's large wooden desk sits at the center of the room. The walls are coated with a variety of photos and decor: White House visits, signed GLA posters, personal photographs of him and Mitch, older black & white pictures from sets at comedy clubs (some where a younger Mitchel Madison takes the mic), and a framed US flag straight from Washington D.C.

BILLY

When you interned here, kid, you were...?

JEMAL

Mailroom and tours, sir.

BILLY

Because that's the great experience Georgetown tuition can buy?

JEMAL

Everyone's gotta start somewhere, I guess.

BILLY

Are you being optimistic so you don't look like an asshole, or are you being optimistic cuz you're optimistic?

Slight pause. Jemal ponders this.

JEMAL

Bit of both, sir?

Billy smiles and nods.

BILLY

Take a seat.

Jemal does so, closing the door behind him.

Billy digs into the upper cabinets of his desk and pulls a few documents, one of them a contract. He slides it in front of Jemal.

Jemal hovers over the paper, confused.

Billy reads from other papers as he talks, then laying them on the table for Jemal to see.

JEMAL

What is this?

BILLY

It's a contract.

JEMAL

Okay?

BILLY

You write a damn, good blog, kid.
You're an English major?

JEMAL

Yes, sir.

BILLY

Junior undergrad?

JEMAL

Yes, sir.

BILLY

Army brat?

JEMAL

In some ways, sir.

BILLY

Brother. Early Deployment.

Jemal hesitates, taken aback by Billy's knowledge of him.

JEMAL

I'm- I'm sorry, how do you know
this?

Billy lifts yet another document in his hands.

BILLY
Your file, kid.

JEMAL
I have a file?

BILLY
You may have never left the
mailroom, but yes, you have a file.

JEMAL
Yes, sir.

BILLY
Okay, stop calling me "sir." Call
me Billy... or just say "yeah."
Yeah?

JEMAL
Yeah.

BILLY
Cool. So, what do you plan with
your degree? What do you want to
do?

JEMAL
Creative writing in entertainment.
Minor in poli-sci so I can combine
the two.

BILLY
As is shown in your blog.

JEMAL
My blog, sir?

Billy stops reading the third document and looks at Jemal for
saying "sir."

JEMAL (CONT'D)
Sorry... "yeah."

BILLY
(amused)
Nice.
(moving on)
Look, you wrote a personal piece
about the Sarah Laughton trial and
FOX News' coverage on it a few days
ago. Mitch read it and wants to use
it for a cold-open, word for word
except for minor show adjustments.
(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

That'll be filmed today and aired tomorrow. Contract confirms your permission of usage, a compensation price, and, on the back, an NDA to protect you from press... I get the feeling that'll be the most important of the three.

Beat. Jemal is silent.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You look scared.

JEMAL

That was just pretty straight forward.

BILLY

No, that's just the business at hand. I'm pretty straight forward.

Slight pause. Jemal's at a lack of words.

BILLY (CONT'D)

So?

JEMAL

You said the NDA was most important?

BILLY

Well, you know your own words, kid. I'd suspect if this were heard by millions of people, you'd understand the necessity.

JEMAL

It's not that harsh.

BILLY

For a blog, maybe. TV...? That's what I'm worried about.

Pause.

Jemal stands and paces.

JEMAL

(disappointed)

And that's it?

BILLY

Yeah.

JEMAL

You know, you could've done this over an email.

BILLY

Mitch wanted to repay his use of your words by possibly giving you a tour of studio or-

JEMAL

I interned here for a whole summer, I've seen the studio.

Billy notices a hint of disappointment in his tone.

BILLY

(pause)

You seem upset now.

JEMAL

No. No, sir- I mean... Billy. Sorry. I just... I just thought...

Billy looks him up and down, finally noticing the attire. It hits him.

BILLY

Jemal. Be honest with me. Were you expecting a job from this meeting?

JEMAL

No.

BILLY

I don't see why else you'd be in a suit, kid.

JEMAL

No. The suit's just because...
(confessing)
...I thought this was an interview.

BILLY

Oh... oh, god. Um...
(beat)
Well listen, kid. I... I don't mean to disappoint. I guess it's a day of miscommunication, wow. I apologize-

JEMAL

No. No, it's- it's fine. I made the mistake-

BILLY
Well, tell me a little about
yourself, so maybe I could-

JEMAL
With all due respect, I'd rather
not.

Billy leans back in his seat. Not offended, just surprised.

BILLY
How's that?

JEMAL
Well... despite already feeling
humiliated, if I went on to flood
your office with the sob story that
is my life, fully aware no job will
come out of it, then I'm... I'm a
fucking moron. So...
(realizing)
Shit. Oh, god! Sorry! Language.
Jesus...

Billy smiles and laughs to himself.

BILLY
Don't worry about it. It was funny.

JEMAL
What do you mean?

BILLY
Just reminded me of someone.
(moving on)
So. How's about this contract?

JEMAL
Does your writing staff even know
about this? About me?

Jemal sits down. Billy sinks a little in his chair.

BILLY
Well... I'll admit, Mitch gave this
to me rather last minute and I've
never really organized the script
before. So...?

JEMAL
So...?

Suddenly, a commotion can be heard from outside Billy's door.
It grows louder. It's the voices of Rory and Gina.

REGINA (O.S.)
(muffled)
Out of my way, Rory.

RORY (O.S.)
(muffled)
No!

REGINA (O.S.)
(clearer)
What're you-?! Stop it!

RORY (O.S.)
(clearer)
I'm running a block! I'm running a
block- fuck!

BILLY
(to Jemal)
They do now.

The office door is thrown open. Regina enters as Rory lingers by the door.

REGINA
What the fuck, Billy?!

Billy and Jemal remain seated. Jemal tenses in his chair.

REGINA (CONT'D)
Since when do we finalize cold-
opens first thing in the fuckin
morning?

BILLY
Gina, can I introduce you to-?

REGINA
No, no- Billy! You can't just do my
job whenever you see fit! And if
you're gonna do it, you can at
least fuckin do it right! We don't
finalize any fuckin verdict on any
fuckin monologue first thing in the
fuckin morning!

BILLY
Did you "fuckin" read it?

REGINA
Yes! I did!

BILLY
What'd you think?

REGINA
Of what?!

BILLY
The piece.

REGINA
It's good, Billy! Raw and a little
messy, but fuckin awesome! Is that
what you wanted to hear?!

BILLY
(pause)
Jemal?

JEMAL
(timidly)
Thank you.

Beat.

Regina realizes. She looks back and forth between the kid and Billy. Jemal sneaks her a smile while trying not to make eye contact.

REGINA
(embarrassed)
Is... Is- Is this-?

BILLY
(mouthed)
"The intern."

JEMAL
(still timid)
I'm a big fan...

REGINA
(to Billy)
Do I look like an asshole, now?

BILLY
Oh, yeah- Gina, this is Jemal
Wilson. Jemal? Regina Little.

Jemal extends his hand. Billy stands from his desk.

JEMAL
You can call me "J" if you want.

Regina slowly shakes his hand, flustered from embarrassment.

REGINA
"Gina."

Billy notices Rory, lingering in the door.

BILLY
What's with the audience?

RORY
Morning, Billy.

BILLY
We've already done that. Where's
Atticus?

Rory hesitates.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Rory?

RORY
Finch is in the War Room.

BILLY
Why is he in the War Room already?

RORY
Editing.

BILLY
Editing what-?

Billy realizes.

BILLY (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Son of a bitch-
(to Rory)
Rory, show the kid around, yeah?
Anywhere but the mailroom.

RORY
Sure.

BILLY
(to Gina)
You, with me.

Jemal stands slowly. Billy look to Jemal, his smile returns.

BILLY (CONT'D)
(to Jemal)
I'll see you in a bit, kid.

Jemal nods. Billy and Regina leave as Rory awkwardly waves at Jemal.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - BACKSTAGE OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Billy charges through the sea of offices and desks, making his way towards "The War Room." Gina hustles behind him, still trying to continue with their conversation.

REGINA

Billy?

Billy pays no attention, he continues his charge.

REGINA (CONT'D)

Billy, we're not done with our talk from before?

BILLY

Was that a talk? I thought that was just public embarrassment... and for you, by the way. Interns are impressionable, you know-

REGINA

Billy-

He stops, turning to her. They face off at the center of all the office commotion.

BILLY

Is it the coffee today? Because since when did you guys become so sensitive over "who wrote what," "what can I put my name on," "who can I out wit," "who does Mitch find more fuckin cute-" he doesn't give a shit, Gina! I don't give a shit! We're all working towards the same thing, a show. Can we just let all of the ego here go?!

REGINA

I never said anything about my ego.

BILLY

(quick deflate)

I know... I think I'm just practicing for Finch, now that I've heard myself...

REGINA

So what was that for me?

BILLY

I don't know. Maybe my polite way of telling you to "fuck off."

Billy turns to walk away. In the corner of his eye he notices Gina, standing still with her hand on her hips.

He stops and turns to her.

BILLY (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

REGINA

I'm waiting for my apology... take your time.

The sea of desks and employees surrounding them begin to take notice of their square off.

BILLY

Listen, Gina-

REGINA

You've never even tried talking to me like that before. And how long have I worked for you?

Billy notices the stares they're starting to get.

BILLY

Gina, can we-

REGINA

How long have I worked for you-? Actually, next question: How long has the show been running?

Billy has no answer.

REGINA (CONT'D)

Trick questions, because they both have the same answer. Always as your head-writer and always with your confidence and trust. I unite the team. I lead the team. I focus the means of their pieces. I edit said pieces, and I get final say over their airing.

BILLY

Mitch technically gets-

REGINA

And that sounds like a lot of
"authority-" I'll admit it gets a
tad fucking overwhelming sometimes-
BUT, who gave me that "authority"
and who gave me that
responsibility?

Billy hesitates.

REGINA (CONT'D)

Billy?!

BILLY

I did-

REGINA

You did. You and Mitch both. I've
upheld that responsibility
successfully for the entire run of
this show. Then, all of sudden,
today- this miraculous fucking day -
all that time, effort, and promise
of responsibility goes through the
fucking window and into the lap of
someone I only just learned was 19.
And yet, all of this- whatever
"this" is -communicated to me over
a text message.

A random employee in the crowd gives a cringing sigh at that.
Billy pretends not to notice.

REGINA (CONT'D)

So... what do you have to say to
me, Billy?

Slight pause.

ATTICUS

Does Otis like the book I gave him?

REGINA

Billy!

BILLY

I fucked up and I fucked you over.
I was in a rush and made a mistake.
Miscommunicated it all. I'm sorry.
Okay..? I'm sorry... I am!

Regina nods, now cooling down.

BILLY (CONT'D)
So... what was that for me?

REGINA
"Public embarrassment for you"
(she looks around)
...maybe for us both.

She begins to walk off to her office.

BILLY
You gonna do the same to Mitch?

REGINA
(walking off)
When he gets here.

Billy smiles.

BILLY
Right.

He pulls out his phone, reminded to look for any missed calls from Mitch: nothing.

BILLY (CONT'D)
(to himself)
When he gets here...

BRENNAN (PRE-LAP)
I want to move on from your show
for a second. Move on to something
else.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA - PRESENT DAY

We're back in the "The O'Donnell Briefing," Mitch looks a bit more agitated than before. He holds on to his playfulness the best he can.

BRENNAN
I would like to talk about...
(pointing at Mitch)
...you, Mitch.

MITCH
Is that not what we've been doing?

BRENNAN
No.

MITCH
(sarcastic)
Oh! Well. Glad that's cleared up.

Brennan shuffles and reads more of his notes.

BRENNAN
Okay, so born and raised in
Williamsburg, New York- Brooklyn
guy-

MITCH
Right.

BRENNAN
Dad was lawyer?

MITCH
Yeah.

BRENNAN
What was your Mom?

MITCH
Not in your notes?

BRENNAN
Mitch-

MITCH
Nanny-for-hire.

BRENNAN
Says here you got a degree from
Columbia... but- but only two years
ago?

MITCH
Honorary Degree. Didn't finish the
first time.

BRENNAN
Why'd you leave?

MITCH
Ummm- comedy. Played some local
clubs, freshman year. Dropped out
to play more.

BRENNAN
You know, I saw a show of yours
once?

MITCH
One of the early ones?

BRENNAN
No. Lincoln Center. The 90s.

MITCH
Yeah? How'd I do?

BRENNAN
Pitiful. Didn't laugh once.

Mitch can't tell whether he's joking or not. He gives a slight wince and counters.

MITCH
Ouch...

BRENNAN
Married once, divorced once- no shame -and now... with child. How old's your daughter, Mitch?

Beat.

MITCH
(slight pause)
She's 7.

BRENNAN
7's a handful.

MITCH
How old are yours?

BRENNAN
35... My son just turned 30.

MITCH
They were handfults at 7, huh?

Brennan focuses on his notes, trying to turn the conversation.

BRENNAN
Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

MITCH
You could always give it another try. You look pretty... "spry."

BRENNAN
Nah, I don't like kids.

MITCH
That's not true-

BRENNAN
(interrupting)
Birchwood Institute for
Rehabilitation and Stability.

Beat.

Long pause. Mitch just stares at Brennan.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - OFF CAMERA - SAME

Billy's entire body clenches from anger. He looks frantically about the studio for the previous EP. She's gone. He bolts out of the soundstage.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA - SAME

Back in the interview.

BRENNAN
Hello? Hello, Mitch?

MITCH
Yeah- yeah, what did you just say?

BRENNAN
"Birchwood Institute for
Rehabilitation and Stability."

MITCH
Okay, I heard that right.

BRENNAN
It's a rehab center in upstate New
York-

MITCH
I know what it is.

BRENNAN
I'd like to talk about that.

Pause. Mitch breaks inside. He's furious, but is able to contain it.

MITCH
(calm)
Pass.

BRENNAN

Mitch.

MITCH

Pass.

BRENNAN

Mitch, there's no shame-

MITCH

Pass.

BRENNAN

Mitch, stop it.

MITCH

What're you doing?

BRENNAN

I'm just talking, Mitch.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE CONTROL BOOTH - SAME

The control booth of "The O'Donnell Briefing" gazes over the two men, tensely staring at each other on camera. Multiple men and women wearing headsets sit at multicolored control boards, covered in an array of lit keys and buttons.

The EP from before, clipboard still in hand, stands above them all as they wait for her mark.

Billy burst through the rooms entrance.

BILLY

What the hell is this?!

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA - SAME

Back in the interview. Mitch sighs, stirring in his seat. He looks down at the table.

BRENNAN

Mitch, your story isn't a spiral or tragedy, it's a comeback story. There's much to admire there. Look, I'm not going to deny the truth that you may want to hush, but-

MITCH

That's not what I'm doing-

BRENNAN

You are a father. You are a business man. You are a man of stature and responsibility, BUT, you are also a recovering addict. A junkie. Let's talk about that.

Pause. Mitch looks up at Brennan coldly. Then:

MITCH

Pass.

BANG

The sound of a gavel slamming down echoes into the next time-jump.

POLICE OFFICER (PRE-LAP)

All rise!

JUDGE (PRE-LAP)

You may be seated.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY - 3 DAYS EARLIER

A small courtroom, typically designated for minor cases. On the respondent's side sits LAURA, Mitch's ex-wife. To her side, her attorney, MS. WILDER, wearing a red pant-suit.

On the applicant's side sits only Mitch, wearing a nice suit and tie.

At the judge's stand sits an elderly white man, looking as if he'd enjoy being anywhere else.

MS. WILDER

Your honor, this has now been the third attempt at a tried case- all of which imposed by Mr. Madison - against the terms already set in the initial divorce between himself and my client, Ms. Felton.

Mitch looks back at the main-door of the courtroom. A small window peaks out into the hall.

Looking through the window we see the face of Mitch's daughter, MICKI (7 years old), making silly faces at him.

MS. WILDER (CONT'D)

Terms were agreed upon against dual-custody and instead for properly guided visitations, this on behalf of Mr. Madison's prior recovery process for substance abuse and an inability to recognize stable employment. All that as a result from his unpredictable, and- to speak freely -immature, career.

Mitch makes faces back at Micki. He turns back to Ms. Wilder.

MS. WILDER (CONT'D)

Though it is against my professional advice, my client, due to her natural patience has instructed me not to push against Mr. Madison, but-

MITCH

Objection!

Ms. Wilder is taken aback by Mitch's interjection.

MS. WILDER

Your honor, it's my closing address.

JUDGE

(to Mitch)

On what grounds, Mr. Madison?

MITCH

Defendant's inability to condense.

JUDGE

I'm sorry?

MITCH

She won't get to the point, your honor.

JUDGE

Overruled. You'll get your turn to speak.

(to Ms. Wilder)

Please, continue.

MS. WILDER

If Mr. Madison wishes for me to get to the point, I will. And I will do so frankly.

(MORE)

MS. WILDER (CONT'D)

I request that Mr. Madison should give up on these consistent attempts, spare our time, spare his legal fees, and appreciate what he already has. That's all, your honor.

She takes a seat. Mitch stares down Laura. Laura stares right back at him, unfazed and giving him a disappointed look.

JUDGE

Mr. Madison?

Mitch breaks his stare with Laura and stands.

MITCH

Yes, your honor?

JUDGE

Will you remind me where your attorney is?

MITCH

She's also an EP on my show, your honor- executive producer. She's currently on a shoot out of state.

JUDGE

That's right. I suspect you have a way to close then?

MITCH

Yes, your honor. I do.

(beat)

I've no incentive to lie, so I'll confirm all that's been said... it's all true. But, first, I'd like to express the hope- being you, for a minute, your honor -that you see not the tenacity of a frustrated, vengeful, compulsive man, but instead a desperate father. One, that loves his daughter very, very much.

(beat)

The nature of my past is not one I am proud of. The 80s, for a working comedian, is popularly recognized as a different time... a different world. One with repercussions I fight to redeem from everyday. I've been fully sober since the debut of my show-

JUDGE

Okay. I'm- I'm going to stop you right there, Mr. Madison.

MITCH

Your honor?

JUDGE

Mr. Madison, I want you to know, my father used do be a drinker...

Mitch stands puzzled by the judge's interruption.

MITCH

(slight pause)

I'm sorry about that?

JUDGE

He too would fight it. He had this saying, I heard it all the time: "one day at a time," he said. It sounded noble, but, frankly, to me, it sounds more unreliable. Didn't keep him from fighting though.

MITCH

How'd he do?

The judge removes his glasses, looking right into Mitch's eyes.

JUDGE

He was unsuccessful. So, when you ask me to hand you the life of a child, and only under the contracts of my trust... I can't help you.

MITCH

Your honor-

JUDGE

Oh, and in regards to your "program." I believe I'm in agreement with Ms. Wilder that what you call your "career," I see as something "unpredictable" and, frankly, Mr. Madison, "immature." I've seen your "work." I should state that I've been kind enough to not be offended by your presence, alone.

MITCH

I bomb that bad?

JUDGE

Dirty remarks on respected members of congress is not what I deem as admirable, Mr. Madison. You may make a decent paycheck, son, but to me I see the marks of blood money. If you want my advice-

MITCH

(to himself)

Jesus fucking christ...

JUDGE

-clean yourself spotless, wrap up that show, find some respect of the sacrifices of our country and maybe then we can negotiate custody.

Mitch doesn't respond.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Now... is there anything else you'd like to close with?

Pause. Mitch looks up at him:

MITCH

You spoon a Reagan portrait at night, don't you?

Laura's face falls into her hands with a sigh.

INT. COURTHOUSE - HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Mitch lifts little Micki for a drink of water at a fountain. Minus a security guard on watch, they're alone. Mitch messes with the water pressure by fiddling with the fountain at its side. Micki giggles.

MICKI

Daddy.

MITCH

(playful)

Oops.

He leaves the fountain alone, just to do it again.

MICKI

(giggling)

Daddy, stop it!

Laura appears behind the two.

LAURA

Are you going to stop getting that hot-headed every time someone digs at your show?

MITCH

The same time you stop hiring "Desperate Housewives of the Bar-Exam" who hate me.

LAURA

She didn't get contempt of court, and you interrupted her closing.

MITCH

She was repeating things from every dissertation-

LAURA

That's her job, Mitch-

MITCH

We had a deal... Laura. We had a deal.

Beat.

LAURA

Micki, come here.

Micki continues to hide behind her father.

MITCH

"I get better. I get my daughter. Family gets better." That's what you said.

LAURA

Micki?

Micki still doesn't move. She's upset at her parent's fighting.

MITCH

I am better, Laura. Look at me. Look- I'm stable. I'm wonderfully employed. I'm sober. You know that-

LAURA

No. No, you are not, Mitch-

MITCH

(furious)

Excuse me? What're you saying-?

LAURA

Micki?

MITCH

(blowing up)

No, no, no- what are trying to say-
what does that mean-?!

LAURA

Micki, come here, right now!

The security guard looms closer to them.

SECURITY GUARD

Sir?

Mitch calms down.

MITCH

I'm sorry. Okay-? I'm sorry.

He squats down to Micki.

MITCH (CONT'D)

(to Micki)

Go with your Mom, okay?

Micki hugs him tight.

MICKI

I love you, daddy.

MITCH

I love you, too, sweetheart.

Micki runs to her mom. Laura lifts Micki in her arms.

LAURA

I'm not saying you're high, Mitch.
I'm saying you're still unwell.

MITCH

What're you talking about?

LAURA

Replace drugs with something else
and it's still called an addiction.
Tell me, when's the last time you
slept in your apartment and not
your office?

Mitch doesn't answer.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I've been patient with these retrials, Mitch. I want this to work for you, but this is exhausting. You get one more chance. I insist you take time before cashing it.

MITCH

What do you want from me?

LAURA

I need you to be worthy of your daughter. Mind the melo-drama, because I know you'll make fun of it, but I need the name "Mitchell Madison" worth his daughter. Not for some dirty jokes about the local DA or jabs at the First Lady.

MITCH

How do-?

LAURA

Maybe start with your show. Do that and you may finally find a judge who likes you.

MITCH

That's not fair-

LAURA

(to Micki)

Wave bye to daddy, baby.

(to Mitch)

Good-bye, Mitchell.

Micki waves over her mom's shoulder to her father. Mitch waves back until they're completely gone. He sighs and reaches in his pocket for his phone. He reads a text. It's from Billy:

"Call me. ASAP"

Mitch dial's Billy's number and puts the phone to his ear.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - "THE WAR ROOM" - MOMENTS LATER

Atticus, hunched over a laptop, sits at the far end of a long, shiny, wooden table, placed at the center of the "The War Room," a.k.a. the writer's room.

The room somehow comes across as spacious and tight at the same time. It's windowless, but still colorful, having each of its four walls coated in used, multicolored post-it notes or whiteboard spaces. Scratches of possible jokes and stories from previous airings mark every corner of the whiteboards, some being half erased. A muted TV sits at the end of the room, continuing to play news coverage of the Sarah Laughton verdict.

A clock sits above the room's closed, glass door. Atticus can feel the pressure of the "TICK, TICK, TICK" as he types away on his laptop.

The ticking lingers... then:

Billy calmly comes through the door. He's trying to be patient... It doesn't stop Atticus from typing.

BILLY

You understand what a coup is?

ATTICUS

Coups come from hate. This is because I love you.

BILLY

Look, Finch, I want to be the peacemaker here: just stop what you're doing, because you're wasting your time. Whatever you're typing, Mitch doesn't want it.

Atticus doesn't stop. Billy's patience dries out fast.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Alright, forget it- You want me to fire you for being an asshole?

ATTICUS

You hired me because I'm an asshole.

BILLY

And I love things coming full circle.

ATTICUS

You'd fire me for doing my job?

BILLY

No, I'd fire you for defying Mitch and my authority. Then for hijacking matters behind my back.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)
And all for what-? Besides
yourself, of course.

Atticus continues to type away, ignoring Billy.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Finch.

Atticus doesn't stop.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Finch!

Still nothing.

BILLY (CONT'D)
ATTICUS!

Billy finally tears Atticus' attention away. Atticus turns to him.

ATTICUS
I know between you and Mitch, he
was good cop and you were bad cop,
but this moment's feeling of
imbalance- hell, this day's feeling
of imbalance -is fucking
extraordinary. Even with your
"authority" or whatever...

BILLY
Imbalanced or not, my authority is
still authority, Finch.

ATTICUS
So?

BILLY
So fuck off!

ATTICUS
That was professional...

BILLY
I'll get back to professional when
I find how to stop feeling like a
fuckin child wrangler today.

ATTICUS
Easy. Don't treat me like a child.

BILLY

Stop acting like one... 24-year-olds are still considered adults these days, right? The 19-year-old did a damn good job of it in my office just now-!

Atticus turns back to his laptop.

ATTICUS

Your dick is hung for the intern that much, isn't it?

BILLY

You talk like that with Mitch, not with me! Keep it up and I will fire you, Finch.

ATTICUS

Beats a replacement.

Billy pauses, taken aback by what Atticus just said.

BILLY

What?! No- No, what- No one is getting replaced-!

ATTICUS

And that's why the intern's here wearing a full suit? What, was he going to Mass and got lost?

BILLY

(realizing)

Is that what this is about? "Wiz kid" gets a little nervous about being upstaged.

ATTICUS

"Wiz kid" just understands job security.

Beat. Billy fumes.

BILLY

You feel threatened? By that kid?

Atticus stands.

ATTICUS

Look, that is not-

BILLY

No, no- sit down, because I'm getting pretty good at lectures today...

Beat. Atticus sits.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Your ego feels threatened, because the "Wiz Kid" grew some pubes on his shaft so people stopped calling him "special." It was a stupid fucking name to begin with, Finch. I am sorry that you're at an existential time- at 24 -and it's made you feel a little rusty, but here's some professional advice: get over yourself! In fact, refresh your memory on that "Wiz Kid" we hired 3 years ago, because this guy I'm looking at here is not it. That kid was willing to drop everything. Be deemed a "coward" by the US Army. Try to serve by telling Americans some god-honest truth for a change, not shoot at innocent foreigners in a war that's not theirs. But where is he now? Fumbling about with his bitchy popularity. Let me tell you, kid, we may have called you "Finch" at your start because we thought it was clever, but I promise on the prior-fuckin-life of Harper-fuckin-Lee, you are not that fucking important.

Pause. They're silent, holding a stare.

BUZZ BUZZ

A notification lights up Billy's phone. He removes it from his pocket and checks it.

BILLY (CONT'D)

It's Mitch. I'm taking this.

(to Atticus)

By the way, "the intern's" name is Jemal. He's a person, actually. A pretty talented writer. Brother of an actual vet, and yeah... he's only 19. Not that you took time to consider the other stuff.

Billy moves to leave through the glass door. Then:

ATTICUS
You like him a lot, don't you?

Billy stops.

BILLY
Hm?

ATTICUS
The intern? "Jemal."

Billy stares at him, not getting his point.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
There's only one other person I've
seen you fight for like that.

Billy doesn't answer. He puts the phone to his ear as he
exits.

BILLY
Mitch?

Jemal's voice echoes over the scene.

JEMAL (PRE-LAP)
So when you air your field pieces
they're shown to the audience...?

INT. GLA STUDIOS - SOUNDSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Rory watches with a smile, unable to hide her amusement as
Jemal aimlessly walks about the GLA soundstage with complete
awe.

Rory points towards a pair of TV monitors near the audience.

RORY
Those two monitors. Mic is hidden
under them to record their
laughs... given we didn't fuck up.

JEMAL
How far in advance do you plan
them?

RORY
Depends on the piece, you know?
Expenses, travel, risk of...
aggravated assault.

Jemal looks at Rory. She shrugs.

RORY (CONT'D)

Like I said. Depends.

(moving on)

Winston's MIA, out shooting one as we speak.

JEMAL

Where is he?

RORY

Couldn't tell you. He wouldn't tell anyone but Mitch and Billy-

A voice appears out of nowhere, startling Rory, not Jemal.

HOWARD

Arlington, Virginia.

It's Howard, standing in the doorframe of his tiny office backstage. He randomly eats a pickle.

Rory sighs at the sight of him.

RORY

Jesus, ya old fuck... Jemal, that's Howard. Head Stage Hand, Cue-card operator... resident Quasimodo.

Jemal approaches his office. He extends his hand.

JEMAL

Hi, I'm-

HOWARD

Mr. Wilson. You wrote tonight's opening. Pleasure.

They shake.

RORY

You gossipy, ancient fart. Word travels fuckin fast, doesn't it?

HOWARD

I just checked my email.

Jemal peaks behind Howard. Looking into his tiny office.

A handful of crinkled, ripped cue-cards line the minimal amount of wall space he has. One catches Jemal's eye.

JEMAL

I know that joke...

Howard looks back, seeing the card Jemal can't stop staring at.

HOWARD

I like to keep my favorites around.
That's an oldie. That one was-

JEMAL

"War on Terror" coverage. The show
had just premiered weeks before.

Both Rory and Howard look back at Jemal, unprepared for his answer.

Jemal points at the cue-card. It reads:

"WAVE AT... STEPHEN HAWKING? NO! TOO EASY... WAIT A MINUTE
... *HOLD FOR FOOTAGE OF GB WAVE TO STEVIE WONDER* THAT'S
STEP ONE! SIGNED, SEALED & DELIVERED..."

RORY

You were how old when that aired?

JEMAL

Um.... fifteen? Brother and I were
latch-key kids, sort of. He'd watch
reruns for hours and he'd force me
to just sit there with him. I asked
him "why?" And he said, "this is
your education, so listen the fuck
up." I asked, "Isn't that what the
news was for?" He shook his head.
He goes: "Besides family, the only
word of fact you can trust is from
a man with nothing to lose. Fuck
the rest of 'em." That's what he
said. And I say, "what kinda man's
that?" A rerun was playing on the
TV, so he just taps the screen.

RORY

Mitch?

JEMAL

I guess...

(beat)

Shipped off to basic that same
weekend.

RORY
Where's he stationed now?

Jemal subtly clutches onto something around his collar. We see it: his brothers dog-tags, slung around his neck. Jemal stands awkwardly unsure of what to tell her...

JEMAL
Um...

ATTICUS
Rory.

Rory jumps again, startled. Atticus approaches them.

RORY
Fuckin shit, will you all stop doing that?!

ATTICUS
Boss-Man's here. Told me to get you both to the War Room.

RORY
I know, Billy said-

ATTICUS
Other Boss-Man.

Jemal's eyes widen.

RORY
Oh, shit.

Rory darts for the exit as Howard returns to his office. Atticus doesn't immediately follow Rory, standing and eyeballing Jemal, thinking about what he just heard the kid say. He knows where his brother is...

Jemal pretends not to notice. Atticus scans him up and down, noticing the dog tags peaking out from his shirt and around his neck, confirming his theory. Jemal leaves.

Atticus looks down at his own dog-tags still around his neck. He sighs.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - MOMENTS LATER

Atticus, Rory, and Jemal approach the door of The War Room, almost in a single file line. We can see Regina through the door's glass, scolding someone deeper in the room.

We hear muffled dialogue, as the other three hesitantly approach:

REGINA
Mitch, my job is to handle
miscommunications with the team
when you're not here!

MITCH (O.S.)
I understand.

REGINA
Billy is not the proper attendant
to handle the script, despite his
"authority!"

MITCH (O.S.)
I understand.

REGINA
All I want is an apology and a
promise this won't happen again!

MITCH (O.S.)
You get both. I apologize.

REGINA
Okay. What is it you wanted to ask
me?

Atticus slowly cracks open the door, revealing Mitch.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - "THE WAR ROOM" - CONTINUOUS

Mitch stands opposite Regina with a box of fresh muffins.
Billy stands in the back corner of the room as well.

MITCH
I just asked if you wanted a
muffin?

REGINA
Are they gluten-free this time?

Slight pause. Mitch see's the three at the door.

MITCH
Heyyyy! Come in, guys. Take a seat.

He sees Jemal at the back of them. Jemal hesitates entering.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 You too, kid! Come on in. "Jemal,"
 correct?

Jemal is flustered. His hero stands inches away from him...
 holding muffins.

JEMAL
 Y- yes. Yes, sir.

MITCH
 Call me "Mitch" from now on.

JEMAL
 Um- right. Yes.

MITCH
 Muffin?

He offers the box. Jemal doesn't know what to do.

JEMAL
 Um... no, thank you.

MITCH
 Snag a chair.

Jemal sits, just as everyone else. Mitch approaches the
 table. He places the muffins down, overly delighted compared
 to the rest of the room.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 Alrighty! 3 to 2 hours to put on a
 show! Time to get to work- have a
 muffin. Anyone, take a muffin.
 Bought 'em fresh, over on... well,
 fuck it, never mind.

He sits at the head of the table.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 So...
 (long pause)
 What did I miss?

Beat.

The whole table, including Jemal, all look at each other.
 Mitch's question ring's in their ear after the morning
 they've had.

There's silence, then suddenly they burst into laughter,
 genuine and heartfelt. Jemal timidly joins in, too. Even
 Billy laughs in the back corner.

RORY
 Fuck it, I'm taking a muffin.

She does. The room laughs even harder. Over the laughter:

MITCH
 Gina, let's get started, huh?

EXT. GLA STUDIOS - HOURS LATER

It's mid-afternoon now in the wintery Manhattan.

A line of people curve around the corner of GLA's studio. They stand bundled in jackets, but move slowly in line to enter the main doors of the building. All are eager and excited with tickets ready in their hands.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - SOUNDSTAGE - SAME TIME

Some folks who've managed to get inside begin to take their seats in the studio audience. Though vacant, Mitch's desk is set and ready to go.

The soundstage's run crew goes about their duties, getting cameras and lights set with final adjustments.

In the small corner of backstage-right, next to Howard's office, stands Atticus, Rory, and Regina. They remain in their clothes from before, peaking out to watch the audience pack into the studio.

REGINA
 Okay... okay... okay. We're fine!
 Show is set and in motion. We're
 fine, right?

ATTICUS
 Gina, calm-?

REGINA
 Cold-open... two field pieces...
 closing remarks. That's run-time.
 Who's leading crowd warm-ups?

RORY
 Sounds like a bit of a thin show-

REGINA
 Rory, not now.

RORY
 Awww... you said that so gently.

REGINA

Fuck you.

RORY

There it is.

ATTICUS

You forgot about the guest.

RORY

Who wouldn't.

ATTICUS

Dude...

RORY

What?! He's the DA of Providence,
Rhode Island.

REGINA

That's pretty big.

RORY

Fuck no it's not. Want to know how
I know?

REGINA

Sure.

RORY

Who's the DA of Providence, Rhode
Island?

Pause. She's got nothing. Meanwhile, Atticus realizes...

ATTICUS

Where's the kid?

INT. GLA STUDIOS - DRESSING ROOM - SAME TIME

Mitch struggles a bit at getting his tie at the length he wants. He stands in the dressing-room mirror, now wearing a new, fresh suit. He tries again at the tie and messes it up.

MITCH

(to himself)

Fuck.

To the left of the mirror, sitting on a stool is Howard, holding a bundle of fresh cue-cards and presenting them to Mitch as he rehearses his lines. He mouths a bit to himself, it's hard to make out.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Howie, can you change that "but" to an "and," please? Third line down.

HOWARD

Gotcha.

KNOCK KNOCK

MITCH

Come in.

Billy peaks his head into the dressing room.

BILLY

Got the kid here. Good time?

MITCH

Yeah. Yeah, send him in. Howie, can I get the room, please?

Howard leaves, so does Billy. Jemal enters alone, still wearing his suit, now a bit more wrinkly from the day. Mitch gives up on the tie and places it on a nearby table with water bottles.

MITCH (CONT'D)

(to Jemal)

Want a water? I'd offer a drink but we don't... for congested reasons.

JEMAL

No, thank you.

MITCH

You know, that's the only thing you've said to me so far today. Granted it's been like three hours but...

Pause. Jemal doesn't know how to reply.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Billy told me about the job misunderstanding. I'm sorry.

JEMAL

No, it's fine. My mistake.

MITCH

I wanted you to feel apart of your own work if we were going to use it.

(MORE)

MITCH (CONT'D)

The whole "studio internship" thing can be a croc of bullshit sometimes, depending on where. Thought this way you'd actually get an education or... I don't know.

JEMAL

(awkward)

No, it's been really fun. Best day of my life...

MITCH

Kudos for wearing the suit. That was bold. Is it yours?

JEMAL

My brothers.

Mitch looks down at Jemal's ragged shoes.

MITCH

What, he decide to keep the shoes?

JEMAL

Something like that.

MITCH

Try me.

JEMAL

He's using them for the time being.

MITCH

What, in some office somewhere?

JEMAL

In the ground.

Pause. Mitch is taken aback.

JEMAL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. That was... that was a lot to just dump. My bad-

MITCH

No, no, no- you're fine. I'm sorry. Condolences.

JEMAL

Thanks.

Mitch looks back at Jemal's shoes.

MITCH
You prefer them, don't you?

JEMAL
I'm sorry?

MITCH
Compared to the suit. They're more comfortable.

Jemal nods. Mitch smirks at him.

MITCH (CONT'D)
You know, with my time in all this you meet a lot of people. Entertainers, politicians, newsmen, ego-freaks... all 4 in 1. But politicians and entertainers-comics, in this case -you think they'd start bleeding together... nope. Wanna know how you tell them apart?

JEMAL
Sure.

MITCH
You can always tell a natural politician from just how comfortable they look in a suit.

JEMAL
You're wearing a suit right now.

MITCH
(jokingly)
Am I?

He looks down at himself, giggling.

MITCH (CONT'D)
It's a costume. And so I can shut Billy up about formalities.

JEMAL
What about comics?

MITCH
A good one? An honest one.
(smiling)
I think they're more comfortable in their own skin. In what really makes them them. No allegiance to anyone, no formalities.
(MORE)

MITCH (CONT'D)

Only themselves and the truth. Raw and honest.

(slight pause)

Why do you think you prefer those pair of ratty, fuckin shoes?

Jemal looks down at his shoes and smiles. He looks back to Mitch.

JEMAL

Mr. Mad- um... Mitch?

MITCH

Hm?

JEMAL

(stumbling)

Why me? I mean, why choose my writing, my- you know, besides the "honesty" and "raw..." stuff?

MITCH

There has to be more a reason?

(he thinks)

I don't know. I like the idea of keeping it as simple as that.

Jemal nods, smiling.

MITCH (CONT'D)

So, let's go start a fire. I'll see you out there, kid. Thank you.

Jemal exits out the door. Mitch looks back at the mirror and messes with his shirt buttons, smiling.

Billy enters just as Jemal exits. He catches Mitch's smile.

BILLY

Figured you'd like him.

MITCH

How's that?

BILLY

Nothing. Just... a joke.

Beat.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Wanna tell me how the trial went today.

MITCH
Sober? Or...?

BILLY
Not funny.

MITCH
It was worth a try.

Mitch picks up his tie from the table before. He gestures it to Billy for help.

Billy sighs and grabs the tie from Mitch's hand. He begins to tie it.

BILLY
Mitch. Come on, tell me.

He briefly stops tying.

BILLY (CONT'D)
What happened?

Mitch looks him in the eye and shakes his head. Billy sighs and starts tying again.

BILLY (CONT'D)
So what happens now?

Billy finishes. It's just right. Mitch looks in the mirror and smiles. He turns to his friend.

MITCH
The only thing I can control.

Mitch moves for the door to leave.

BILLY
You sure about that?

Mitch stops.

MITCH
Well... after today...?
(he thinks)
I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

He smiles and leaves.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mitch closes the door behind him and leans his head on it. He takes a moment... he cries, finally letting the events of today hit him. He tries to stop himself before Billy hears him through the door.

He pushes himself off the door, wipes his face, fixes his sleeves and begins his march to the stage.

We hear the sound of rhythmic stomping and clapping coming from the main doors to the stage ahead. It gets louder. Mitch hears it too. He feels as if he's moving in slow-motion (which, ideally, he would be...).

Then:

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Rolling in five... four... three...
two... Ladies and Gentlemen... your
host: MITCHELL MADISON!!!

We hear the GLA theme blast to full volume as Mitch bursts through the stage doors.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - SOUNDSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

We see the audience standing and wildly applauding for Mitch. The notorious host sprints for his chair, smiling and waving. He calls to the crowd over their cheers.

MITCH
Welcome, folks! Welcome! How we
doin?!?

The cheers continue. Mitch hops in his chair. The show has finally begun:

MITCH (CONT'D)
Hello! Hello! Hello! This is
"Goodnight, Ladies & Americans!"
I'm Mitchell Madison, you can call
me Mitch!

The clapping continues:

MITCH (CONT'D)
Now.... lets calm it. Lets calm it,
folks...

The applause dies down.

MITCH (CONT'D)
(playing dumb)
Well... where do we start? What a
day- what a week... anything going
on we should... chat about...?

Laughs from the audience.

MITCH (CONT'D)
Wait! I got it.

A clip of news coverage on the Sarah Laughton trial pops on
the monitor for a couple seconds. It holds.

MITCH (CONT'D)
(re: the clips)
Riiiiight...

Laughs--

MITCH (CONT'D)
Trial of century! Former staff
sergeant Sarah Laughton appeals to
the Supreme Court this week. A
trial against the US military,
against an unjust reprimand, post
innocent verdict on the charges of
manslaughter...

Pause-- The audience is silent. Mitch notices.

MITCH (CONT'D)
I notice a tone shift in the room.

The audience giggles.

MITCH (CONT'D)
And that makes sense. In fact,
appropriate. But tonight, where
it'd be easier for me to gag at
your favorite multi-million net
worthy sooth sayers at places like
CNN, NBC, ABC- just the little
ones, you know? No- I wish to take
things a bit more seriously with
you tonight...
(slight pause)
...okay, that's melodramatic. I
just want to chat. Particularly
with a little friend of ours a few
avenues over at FOX News. So, here
we go...

Mitch takes a breath, sneaking a glance backstage.

It's to Jemal standing with the rest of the team, shaking as he watches Mitch. Mitch winks at him.

Jemal smiles and calms.

MITCH (CONT'D)

In the judicial process of the United States of America, there are a smorgasbord of pivotal phrases that we'd rather associate with... say "Law & Order..." maybe "Batman," before threading it to any actual law practice: "Innocent before proven guilty-" one. "Justice delayed is justice denied-" two. "Make crime pay..." That one was said by Will Rogers. Yet, when it comes to FOX News, the incentive of an almost parody capitalist business model has decided to use those metaphorical words of a satirist- "Make crime pay" -and take it literal... well, that is if the amount of 0s on Brennan O'Donnell's check make his case of the Monday's go away. NOW, to call out FOX alone for being incentivized by money, agenda, or the sensationalism of narrative over truth would be fairly hypocritical... and stupid. Most media outlets would surely be guilty of the same if put a oath. We're all guilty in this guilty world... BUT-

(beat)

"Make crime pay." That is... if there was a crime, which in Sarah Laughton's case there wasn't. And that is... if there was reporting about said crime to profit on- "pay" -which in FOX's case... there wasn't... almost. Sarah Laughton's back to back cases were the "trials of the century" on every possible news outlet for weeks. At FOX? Might as well call it "trial of the temporary- unless it fit the corrected, profitable narrative of- " you know what, that's way too long. "Sarah Laughton is a treasonous," see that's easier! What else?

(MORE)

MITCH (CONT'D)

"How dare she then point the finger at our great nation like the pig she is..." And, you know, that's being friendly because, as a trans veteran, FOX would, one, forget to use her proper pronouns, or, two, even call her Sarah. That? That was their narrative. It was based around a lot things, but don't you dare say one them was "truth." Truth, especially in world of media and crime, now comes with a price at auction, and not just at FOX. "Make crime pay?" Or, more appropriately, "Make crime pay... my salary." Again, that's better. Was it for the money? Sure, but we'd be lying if we claimed that as the lone reason. Should they be ashamed of themselves? Well...

The image of Mitch at his studio desk freezes. The quality of the screen turns hazy, as if we were seeing it on a monitor.

A voice echoes over the image.

BRENNAN (V.O.)

Let's just stop it there...

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA - PRESENT DAY

We pull out from a monitor, frozen on the image of Mitch post-monologue. He seems so cheery on the frame as it suddenly turns to static.

Mitch, now in the present, sitting back in his seat, can no longer hide the anger on his face.

Brennan holds a long, judgmental stare on Mitch. Then:

BRENNAN

So. Where do we start?

MITCH

You asked that like over an hour ago, man.

Brennan leans closely to his desk.

BRENNAN

Mitch, do you understand the kind of calls someone like me gets seconds after someone like you says such things on air?

MITCH

I can attempt.

BRENNAN

Meetings. PR nightmares. Getting verbally lynched by my executives.

MITCH

Sensitive office isn't it?

BRENNAN

That's enough, Mitch! I'm tired of that!

MITCH

Of what?

BRENNAN

That! That. Your incapability to match your words nor your attitude with any kind of responsibility.

MITCH

Who's responsibility? What're you-?

BRENNAN

Yours. Your public influence. Your clever little subjugation against not only me, not the entire FOX network, but the entire world, Mitch. Headline: "Hot-head, Mitchell Madison vs. The World, featuring his notorious brat-pack!" See them there?

The faces of his writing staff appear on a monitor before him.

Brennan points at them scoldingly. He falsely simmers for a second, giving a fake performance of sympathy.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)

But alas, Mitch... Despite my frustration- similarly, I can imagine, with the folks watching at home -seeing a man with your kind of history... I guess I have no choice but to understand.

Beat.

MITCH

What?

BRENNAN

I will try to give you the benefit of the doubt, but only if you tell me, who-

MITCH

What- What is this?

BRENNAN

How's that-?

MITCH

What is this show that you're-? I mean, what're we doing?

BRENNAN

Who?

MITCH

"Who?" Really- watch, Imma try my best De Niro: "I'm the only one here-" You! What're you doing?

BRENNAN

I'm running my program, Mitch-

MITCH

I can see that- I mean with me! What exactly are you trying to accomplish-?

BRENNAN

I'm just trying to understand you, Mitch-

MITCH

I've been on your show over four times, Bren. Trust me, I'm not that interesting.

Mitch tries to hold himself back with everything.

BRENNAN

I don't know what you're getting at.

MITCH

Delegitimization. That's it, isn't it? That's been your big strategy.

BRENNAN

(joking)

That's a big word, Mitch...

Pause... Mitch takes a deep breath.

Then, finally, he unleashes:

MITCH

You were offended by a couple of remarks I had for you and your show, so you're best idea of some kind of "retort" was a kindly invitation on your program with a set plan of rhetoric to delegitimize me... the host of a comedy show...

BRENNAN

Annd that's a big claim, Mitch-

MITCH

You start by insulting my team. Mocking them not only professionally, but personally, "one-by-one." You then move onto my show, talking down to it as if it were a dog that took a dump on your Feng shui rug in that castle of yours up-state. And then there's me. You intend to delegitimize me... Trust me! There is nothing you can do to delegitimize me more than I do to myself daily, and with pride!

BRENNAN

Getting a little frustrated, Mitch?

MITCH

"Getting a little-" I am frustrated! I am! Tell me, am I some kind of threat to you?

BRENNAN

Mitch-

MITCH

No- tell me. At the highest ideal of myself what do you think I am?

BRENNAN

I don't follow-

MITCH

With everything I do, everything I say, here or on my own show, what do you think it is that I wish to be?

BRENNAN

Honestly?

MITCH

That'd be nice.

BRENNAN

I think you wish to be a political player.

MITCH

Similar to someone like you?

BRENNAN

With political difference, yes-

MITCH

Cool. Then you're wrong. We are not the same. I am a comedian first. That is something people like you need to understand. Sure, my jokes may be based in ideological principles, but claiming I share the same weight of influence as you... that's the real joke.

BRENNAN

I think you underestimate the severity your power, Mitch.

MITCH

Oh, stop that! Stop comparing me to some... some king, okay? I'm not a king, I will never be one, I am but the mere jester, friend-

BRENNAN

"The jester is the only one in the kingdom that could speak truth to the king!" Famous quote, Mitch!

MITCH

So what does that say about you?

BRENNAN

Now I'm frustrated, Mitch! You want to let me talk on my own show-?

MITCH

You're frustrated? I'm infuriated.

Brennan suddenly gets overly calm with Mitch, baiting him.

BRENNAN

Why's that?

MITCH

"Why's th-?!" What do you- because- I mean- wha- THIS! This right here. You keep asking about my "responsibility." My "power." My "responsibility-" what about yours? Yeah, when does yours come into play, Bren? Because it seems to me that any spark of your supposed "responsibility" only crowns its head when some clown, like me, with a little bit of clout to his name calls you on your lack of it. Calls you on misjudgment. Calls you recklessness. Calls you on bias. Calls you on Sarah Laughton. Misinformation! You know, post-watergate, percentile trust from the public towards the media dropped to 44%, and that number was from almost a decade ago. How does that happen?! Yet, you still go on, big smile on your face, riding this ship like it's a full functioning Disney Cruise. Read the bow of the ship, Bren! T-I-T-A-N-I-C.

Brennan gives him a puzzled look. Mitch notices:

MITCH (CONT'D)

Titanic! It spells "Titanic," mother...

(moving on)

Look, you first asked me what I thought the biggest problem with this country was- well let me tell you. It's the knowing that everyday some shmuck out there with a good amount of dollar in his pocket is gonna walk around, spitting shinola as fact to his buddies. And when they ask him where he heard that from, he's gonna site his dimwitted, moronic source to a man like you!

Pause.

BRENNAN

Wow... let's end it there, shall we.

MITCH

Glad to.

BRENNAN

Good to know you can at least be funny on your program, Mitch.

MITCH

Great. Glad to know you're just as much of a cunt on yours.

BEAT.

Mitch's eyes widen. He realizes what he's just done.

Brennan smirks in victory, leaning back in his seat.

BRENNAN

Nice... family show, Mitch.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE CONTROL BOOTH - SAME

Billy does the same as Mitch, frozen by what just happened.

Brennan's EP whispers into her mic:

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Cut the censor.

Billy hears this and dashes out of the control booth.

INT. GLA STUDIOS - "THE WAR ROOM" - SAME TIME

We now see The War Room at the present day. Regina, Atticus, and Rory are scattered all over the room.

They're all silent from shock as well.

Brennan continues over the broadcast.

BRENNAN (O.S.)

Well... on that note, folks, you can catch Mitchell Madison, of course, on the late-night program, "Goodnight, Ladies & Americans.

(MORE)

BRENNAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Glad to have him on the show. When
we return...

Atticus speaks up.

ATTICUS
Fuck... me.

His face sinks in his hand.

INT. FOX NEWS SOUNDSTAGE - ON CAMERA - MOMENTS LATER

Brennan concludes his broadcast:

BRENNAN
We'll be right back, after this.

RIIIING

The soundstage lights up for a commercial break.

Brennan shuffles his papers and stands to leave the table.

Mitch still sits idle, in shock.

BRENNAN (CONT'D)
Good one, Mitch. Listen, I don't
know if it was you or "whomever-the-
fuck" that wrote that thing. Either
way, I'll see you both in court.
Take care.

Brennan steps away. Mitch sits with himself for a while,
staring at his reflection in the table.

Billy dashes through the doors of the soundstage. He looks
out of breath. The two exchange a long stare.

Mitch returns to his reflection.

He sits in a long stretch of silence.

Then...

MITCH
(to himself)
Shit.

CUT TO BLACK.

END