

AD HOMINEM

Written By

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One-Hour Pilot

AD HOMINEM

FADE IN:

EXT. HOLY TRINITY SCHOOL - WASHINGTON D.C. - 1974

D.C.'s oldest elementary school. A Georgetown landmark. Pre-Civil War white brick. A plaque tells us it was established in 1818. A HIPPIE walking by and a VW Bug parked on the street lets us know it is 1974. We are only here as prologue.

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)

Furthermore, if elected as your second grade representative I promise to push the student council to get a trip to the top of the Washington Monument added to our field trip to the Smithsonian.

Two JESUIT PRIESTS ascend the steps into the school and enter. We follow them into --

INT. HOLY TRINITY SCHOOL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

-- the ancient hallway adorned with intimidating CATHOLIC STATUES of Saints, the Virgin Mary and, of course, Jesus.

The Jesuits march past the closed classroom doors. CAM stays on Room 3. Through the transom we HEAR:

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)

In conclusion, I will do my best to make sure the voices of Sister Ursula's second grade class --

PUSH IN through the transom and into --

INT. SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

The YOUNG GIRL, cute as a button in her Girl Scout uniform, is standing at a lectern in front of the class. Her Girl Scout SASH is covered with patches. An overachiever.

YOUNG GIRL

-- will be heard. A vote for Mary Collins is a vote for Room Three and all of Holy Trinity. Thank you.

There is a smattering of applause from the SECOND GRADE CLASS. MARY takes her seat with a self-impressed grin.

SISTER URSULA, an ancient Irish nun, sits at her desk in the back grading papers.

SISTER URSULA

(heavy brogue)

Thank you, Mary.

(heavy sigh; reluctantly)

John Quinlan?

Eight-year old JOHN QUINLAN takes the lectern. His charming bravado is taller than his four feet two inches. Not precocious in the least. He is a natural born politician.

YOUNG FITZ

Thank you, Sister. Class. My name is John Fitzgerald Quinlan and I am running for your second grade room representative.

(beat)

My friends call me Fitz.

Fitz slowly scans the room getting eye contact with each and every school uniformed student. He lingers on Mary, then:

YOUNG FITZ (CONT'D)

My opponent said a lot of things up here and there is no doubt that some of them are true. She is indeed an A student. Then again, I'd probably be an A student too if I sat behind Jenny Coogan.

A few students SNICKER and exchange glances. JENNY COOGAN grins; Mary grimaces. Did he just imply that Mary Collins copies off Jenny Coogan's papers?

YOUNG FITZ (CONT'D)

As you noticed, Mary was wearing her Girl Scout uniform. I guess I could have worn my Cub Scout uniform but I was under the impression we were only allowed to wear our scout uniforms on meeting days. Perhaps I was wrong on that. No matter. I wore my school uniform just like the rest of you did.

Several of his Catholic School uniformed classmates sit up. This is getting good.

YOUNG FITZ (CONT'D)

Mary proudly showed you the patch she earned for selling over one hundred boxes of cookies and said she would use her cookie selling skills for our own fund raisers.

(MORE)

YOUNG FITZ (CONT'D)

But I know for a fact that Mary didn't really sell all those cookies. My mom works with Mary's mom at the Treasury Department and told me Mary's mom brought the order form to work and pressured all of their co-workers to buy cookies. So Mary didn't really sell all those cookies. Her mom did.

Sister Ursula reaches for a YARD STICK and grips it firmly.

SISTER URSULA

Mister Quinlan, tell the class about your qualifications. Not about Mary's. Or her mother's.

YOUNG FITZ

(just getting warmed up)

I was born here in D.C. I live on 33rd street and we have been parishioners at Holy Trinity since my great-grandfather arrived from Ireland. I have been a student here since pre-school. I ride my bike in early every morning to serve mass with Father Prendergast.

(a careful beat)

Mary lives in Bethesda. She rides in with her mom every morning. That is why she is tardy so much. Can we count on her to make the student council meetings before school? Not only is Mary not a member of this parish, our parish, by living in Maryland but Mary and her family aren't even Catholic. They pay the non-Catholic tuition. I saw it on her envelope.

THWACK! Sister Ursula hits a desk with the yardstick.

SISTER URSULA

John Fitzgerald Quinlan. I am warning you.

John and the Nun lock eyes. Not overtly combative. More a battle of wits. And wills.

YOUNG FITZ

Our class deserves a representative that will put their best foot forward. Which brings me to an important issue --

Sister Ursula relaxes her grip on the yard stick.

YOUNG FITZ (CONT'D)  
 -- nose picking. Mary Collins picks  
 her nose. We've all seen her do it.

Sister Ursula grabs the yardstick and rises. She heads for  
 the front of the class. With purpose.

YOUNG FITZ (CONT'D)  
 She says she is just scratching an  
 itch but we know she is digging for  
 gold. Look under her desk. That's  
 not gum under there. Do you want a  
 nose picking, non-Catholic from  
 Maryland representing your class?

Fitz ducks as Sister Ursula swings. Strike one.

YOUNG FITZ (CONT'D)  
 Or me, John Fitzgerald Quinlan! A  
 native son of D.C., Catholic, non-  
 nose picker. The choice is clear --

Sister Ursula swings again, missing Fitz, striking the  
 lectern, splintering the yardstick. Strike two. Fitz is  
 bobbing and weaving as he gets out his final plea.

YOUNG FITZ (CONT'D)  
 -- vote Fitz! *Ad Majorem Dei*  
*Gloriam!* Thank you.

Sister Ursula grabs Fitz by the earlobe and pulls hard.

INT. HALLWAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Fitz is standing alone against the wall gently rubbing his  
 damaged ear. He's no stranger to the hall. He looks up and  
 stares at a life-sized CRUCIFIX hanging on the wall. Jesus  
 appears to be looking at him disapprovingly.

YOUNG FITZ  
 (sotto)  
 You and me. Right, Jesus?

The door to Room 3 swings open and Sister Ursula comes out to  
 dress down her least favorite student.

SISTER URSULA  
 What do you have to say for  
 yourself, young man?

Young Fitz goes to speak.

SISTER URSULA (CONT'D)  
 Hold your tongue. You've said quite  
 enough this morning.

Sister Ursula looks him up and down. Then:

SISTER URSULA (CONT'D)  
 Where do you think it'll get you? I  
 tell you where? Hell. Do you think  
 our glorious Father wants the likes  
 of you at his right hand side in  
 the Kingdom of Heaven? Talking that  
 rubbish about a lovely young girl.  
 You'll never make a name for  
 yourself by tearing down others.  
 It's a dangerous path you are  
 walking down. Satan's path.

Sister Ursula lets her last thought hang in the air.

SISTER URSULA (CONT'D)  
 Timothy O'Reilly is tabulating the  
 votes. I was going to remove your  
 name from the ballot but I want you  
 to see first hand that you don't  
 succeed this way. Extolling your  
 own virtues is how you get ahead.  
 Not by besmirching others.

Young Fitz nods halfheartedly.

SISTER URSULA (CONT'D)  
 Now go inside and get a little  
 penance from your classmates.

INT. ROOM THREE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fitz enters the quiet classroom followed by Sister Ursula. All are silent except Mary Collins. She is crying.

YOUNG FITZ'S POV: He looks at the faces of his classmates. Then to the two stacks of ballots on the front table: one tall; one short. Then the board.

ANGLE ON CHALKBOARD: We see "MARY COLLINS" in chalk with a number "7" written next to it. We PAN QUICKLY to see: "Fitz" and the number "26" drawn next to it.

SISTER URSULA  
 (disgusted)  
 Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Sister Ursula eyeballs TIMMY O'REILLY with contempt.

TIMMY O'REILLY

(scared)

What? That's how it came out. I counted them twice like you said.

CLOSE ON: Young John Fitzgerald Quinlan. Fitz. Second grade Class Representative. A devious, unapologetic, victorious smile slowly spreads across his face. A smile that will live there more than it doesn't for the rest of his life.

YOUNG FITZ

(sotto; softly)

Well, God damn.

Sister Ursula THWACKS him in the back of the head. Hard. Fitz doesn't mind.

PRE-LAP: MUSIC and a CHORUS OF CHILDREN singing "FIFTY NIFTY UNITED STATES."

Under the music we PUSH past Young Fitz, toward the chalkboard and come to a rest on a FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON.

CHILDREN (SINGING)

*Fifty, nifty United States from  
thirteen original colonies --*

As the song continues, the photograph DISSOLVES to a photo of GERALD FORD. Then JIMMY CARTER. RONALD REAGAN. GEORGE BUSH --

CHILDREN (SINGING) (CONT'D)

*--Fifty, nifty stars in the flag  
that billow so beautifully in the  
breeze.*

-- BILL CLINTON. GEORGE W. BUSH. BARACK OBAMA, and, finally, DONALD J. TRUMP.

CAM PULLS BACK TO REVEAL --

INT. ROOM THREE - HOLY TRINITY SCHOOL - MODERN DAY

Little has changed. A YOUNGER NUN is conducting a GROUP of 8-YEAR-OLDS standing on choir risers singing "FIFTY NIFTY UNITED STATES" with great enthusiasm. Each child holds a cardboard SECTION of the country.

CHILDREN (SINGING)

*Each individual state contributes a  
quality that is great. Each  
individual state deserves a bow. We  
salute them now.*

The children hold their cardboard states together to form a haphazard America. Their singing of the state names continues under the V.O.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

We are a governed nation. A republic where supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives. One President. A Vice President. Four hundred thirty-five Congressman. One hundred Senators.

PUSH IN on the CARDBOARD COUNTRY until it is FULL FRAME.

MATCHING SHOT: The United States from a Google Earth view. We slowly drop from space until we are in the Mid-West.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Fifty governors. Lieutenant Governors. Secretaries of State. Attorney Generals. State Auditors. Commissioners. Each state has its own Congress and Senate. Plus people running for offices no one even thinks about except when checking off a name on a ballot.

INSERT SHOT: A PUSH PIN BALLOT opened to the page with the choices for STATE COMPTROLLER. An INDECISIVE HAND hovers over the three choices. Then, without a clue, selects one.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

What the hell does a comptroller do anyway?

SERIES OF SHOTS: Waves of grain dancing in the wind. The Colorado River. The Appalachian Trail. A travelogue of the United States at its simplest. Feels almost like a political ad or a video for "America The Beautiful."

MAN'S VOICE

They say all politics is local and on that level you have mayors, city councils, sheriffs, judges, school boards, alderman, superintendents, neighborhood associations.

EXT. THE ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

A huge TOUR BUS barrels into FRAME on Highway 19. Feels like a rock band late for a gig.

Across the side of the bus, amidst myriad American flags, is the FACE of a Palin-esque Politician. Except she is blond, buxom and blue-eyed. A Republican Dolly Parton.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

There is no shortage of people that want to stop being told what to do and start telling other people what to do. It is how our country was founded.

The side of the bus has "MELORA DANDRIDGE: TAKE ARIZONA BACK" in large cursive script. It is followed by a half dozen NEWS TRUCKS and a NEWS HELICOPTER.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

It is why our country was founded.

QUICK SHOTS: A dozen YARD SIGNS with various names and slogans being hammered into front yards across the nation. Among them we see "CONROY FOR KANSAS," "VOTE DANDRIDGE FOR SENATE" and, simply, "SPENCE."

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Everybody's running for something.

INT. FACTORY

A large machine cranking out CAMPAIGN BUTTONS into a bin. CAM PUSHES into the bin and we see they read: "MAKE MINE MELORA."

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Cynics will tell you the entire political process has changed.

QUICK SHOTS: Overlapping clips of various NEWS ANCHORS decrying the current political state of affairs.

DIANE SAWYER

...there were more negative political campaigns this year than anytime on record.

ANDERSON COOPER

... they have taken dirty to a whole new level.

LOCAL ANCHOR

...mudslinging seems to be the flavor of the day.

SHEPARD SMITH

... this is the dirtiest campaign in history.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

It hasn't.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - AERIAL SHOT

We pass the TIDAL BASIN, across THE MEMORIALS, over the WHITE HOUSE and across to GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 People suffer under the delusion  
 that the founding fathers were more  
 noble than people running today.  
 That there was civility in early  
 political discourse. Bullshit.

INT. HEALY LECTURE HALL - GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY - CONTINUOUS

Fifty STUDENTS spread out in a large lecture hall intently listening to the guest speaker. CAM SLOWLY PANS their faces until it ends up --

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.)  
 Our founding fathers knew then what  
 we know now: the three rules of  
 running a successful campaign --

-- on their guest speaker. JOHN FITZGERALD QUINLAN standing at the lectern just like he did when he was eight. Only now he is late 40s, impeccably dressed, handsome and carries himself with that forgivable arrogance that comes from a lifetime of always knowing he is the smartest person in the room. His friends still call him Fitz.

FITZ  
 -- Attack! Attack! Attack!

Fitz lets the three most important words in his life hang in the air as he gets eye contact with the room.

FITZ (CONT'D)  
 Go negative or go home. The  
 presidential campaign of 1800 got  
 so ugly that John Adams and Thomas  
 Jefferson didn't even speak to each  
 other for ten years. And these guys  
 were lifelong friends. Jefferson's  
 campaign said John Adams was of  
 "hermaphroditical character which  
 has neither the force and firmness  
 of a man, nor the gentleness and  
 sensibility of a woman."

Fitz is in his element. His second favorite thing is talking negative politics. His favorite? Participating in it.

FITZ (CONT'D)  
 Pretty heavy shit for 1800. John  
 Adams' camp fired back: Thomas  
 Jefferson is a mean-spirited, low  
 life.

(MORE)

FITZ (CONT'D)

The son of a half-breed Indian squaw sired by a Virginia mulatto father. See, even back then no one liked Virginians.

A small chuckle from a few of the Students.

FITZ (CONT'D)

Then... it got ugly.

A bigger laugh.

FITZ (CONT'D)

Adams called Jefferson a coward, a rapist, a nigger-lover --

Unease sweeps the room at Fitz's pejorative use. But, just for a second. Fitz pulls off ugly language like nobody.

FITZ (CONT'D)

-- who slept with his slaves and fathered a shitload of bastard children. Called him a libertine and an atheist. None of which is untrue, by the way.

(beat)

Jefferson hired a pamphleteer named James Callender who makes Karl Rove and Lee Atwater look like pussycats. Callender put out the word that Adams wanted to start a war with France. Wasn't true. But it worked. James Callender was the first American political strategist. Google him. The very first oppo man.

A cute GRAD STUDENT raises her hand.

FEMALE STUDENT

Oppo man?

Fitz gets eye contact with the Student. You'd swear his eyes actually twinkled. She is unimpressed.

FITZ

Opposition Research. The foundation of any successful political campaign. It's what I do. I am currently serving as a political consultant, overseeing opposition research, on thirteen campaigns: three Governors, four United States Senators, two U.S.

(MORE)

FITZ (CONT'D)  
 Congressman, two state Senator and  
 two Mayors. I like keeping busy.

PRE-LAP: A RINGING PHONE.

INT. OFFICE RECEPTION DESK - SIMULTANEOUS

CLOSE ON: Ornate lettering on a white wall: "SCHADENFREUDE."

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)  
 (answering the phone)  
 Schadenfreude, good morning.

PULL BACK to see a model pretty, young receptionist, GEORGIA STEVENS, wearing an operator's headset and manning the front desk. She is the gatekeeper. And damn good at it.

GEORGIA  
 (into headset)  
 I'm sorry, Senator, Mr. Quinlan  
 isn't in at the moment. Can I have  
 him return? You too, Senator.

Georgia hits a button on the phone.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)  
 (into headset)  
 Schadenfreude, good morning. No.  
 I'm sorry. Mr. Quinlan isn't in  
 right now. Can I transfer you to  
 Miss Cahill? Hold please.

The glass entrance door swings OPENS. Georgia looks up. Disappointed. It's not who she hoped it would be.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)  
 (perturbed)  
 Where is he?

REVERSE ANGLE: In the doorway, carrying a briefcase and a Starbucks' cup, is LEON POWELL, 40s, African-American. An affable, bear of a man in a custom tailored Armani suit.

LEON  
 (playfully)  
 Georgia, Georgia, Georgia. Where's  
 the love? No "Good morning, Leon?"  
 No "How are you this morning,  
 Leon?" No "Damn, Leon, you are  
 looking mighty fine in that new  
 suit?"

The phone RINGS again. And again.

GEORGIA  
 (into headset)  
 Schadenfreude, good morning. Please hold. Schadenfreude, hold please.  
 (to Leon; slightly patronizing)  
 Good morning, Leon. How are you this morning, Leon? Damn, you are looking mighty fine in that new suit.

Leon playfully spins around to give her the full view.

LEON  
 Nice, right? Capitol Big and Tall.

GEORGIA  
 Where is he? Poll numbers came in. Down in Kansas, Missouri and Wyoming. Way down in Arizona. Up in New Mexico, South Carolina. The rest unchanged. The phones have been ringing off the hook.

Leon takes a large stack of messages from Georgia's desk and starts flipping through them.

LEON  
 Our man, Fitz, is guest lecturing at a poli-sci class at Georgetown University enlightening our country's overprivileged youth on the intricacies of negative campaigning, ad hominem attacks, push polling, swift boating, moral panic, and all the other lovely little weapons in the Schadenfreude arsenal. He is a proud alumni. Between us, I think he is bucking for an honorary doctorate.  
 (looks at watch)  
 Knowing Fitz, they should be turning on him at any minute.

INT. HEALY LECTURE HALL - SIMULTANEOUS

The room is dark as the iconic, black and white, Daisy Girl political ad plays on a large SCREEN: a six-year-old girl in a field pulling pedals off a daisy and counting them.

DAISY GIRL  
 (in video)  
 One, two, three, four, five --

ANGLE ON: Fitz mouthing along to the Daisy Girl's inaccurate countdown on the screen.

DAISY GIRL (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
-- seven, six, six, eight, nine.

As the ominous MALE VOICE counts down a missile launch Fitz watches the screen with wonder. It is a thing of beauty.

ANGLE ON VIDEO SCREEN: The mushroom cloud NUCLEAR EXPLOSION fills the video screen. Fitz talks over the scratchy V.O. recording of LYNDON JOHNSON.

<p>LYNDON JOHNSON (on video) "These are the stakes! To make a world in which all of God's children can live. Or go into the dark. We must either love each other or we must die."</p>	<p>FITZ (O.S.) September 7, 1964. It only aired once. That's all it had to. The media replayed the shit out of it for days. It... was... genius.</p>
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The LIGHTS COME UP as the Video's Narrator buttons it:

NARRATOR'S VOICE  
"Vote for President Johnson on November third. The stakes are too high to stay home."

FITZ  
And just like that, Barry Goldwater was toast.

INT. SCHADENFREUDE OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

JESSICA CAHILL, 30, is going through a stack of poll numbers at her desk in the corner office she has more than earned. Very pretty, tough as nails. A FLAT SCREEN on the wall is tuned to FOX NEWS.

JESSICA  
(into intercom)  
Stevie, get me Joe Taylor in Senator Bracken's office.

Leon ENTERS elated.

LEON  
Switch to MSNBC. Quick.

Leon fumbles with the switches on the flat screen and switches to several channels, none of which are MSNBC.

JESSICA

Don't touch! Don't touch. Stop!

Jessica uses the REMOTE CONTROL from her desk and is immediately on MSNBC.

NEWS ANCHOR

Just when you thought the South Carolina gubernatorial race could not get any uglier we see this.

Screen goes to a NEWS PACKAGE beginning with a political ad. An unflattering STILL of an older man, JESSIE MATTHEWS, fills the screen.

MALE VOICE

(on television screen)

"Jessie Matthews says he stands for South Carolinian family values."

LEON

I picked that still photo. Motherfucker practically has horns.

JESSICA

Shush!

MALE VOICE

(on TV)

But just what are those values?

On the television screen are QUICK SHOTS of archival footage: BURNING CROSSES, KLANSMAN, RACE RIOTS etc.

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)

(on TV)

Jessie Matthews grandfather was an Imperial Wizard in the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. He admits this.

Black and white footage (Circa 1950) of an 8-YEAR-OLD BOY in KLAN robe and hood reading from a piece of paper.

KLAN BOY

(on TV)

I do not want to go to school with the --

On the VIDEO: The Klan Boy leans over to an adult Klansman for help with the word he cannot pronounce.

KLAN BOY (CONT'D)

-- ne-gro children.

LEON

I love how he says it: "knee-grow."

JESSICA

The kid's not Matthews though,  
right? That's not his grandfather.

It isn't.

LEON

Who's to say? They wore hoods.

MALE VOICE

(on TV)

"Here is what Matthews says about  
his grandfather."

MATTHEWS (V.O.)

(filtered; on television)

"I loved my grandfather... He  
taught me a lot... He was a good  
man... He had real family values."

Leon is smiling from ear to ear.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

(on television)

"Are these the values for ALL the  
people in South Carolina? Vote  
Robert Spence for Governor. For  
today's South Carolina.

(quickly delivered)

Paid for by South Carolinians For  
Humanity."

NEWS ANCHOR

Joining us in studio to discuss --

Jessica MUTES the television.

JESSICA

Rough. That's gonna dominate the  
news cycle for a while. What were  
the full quotes?

LEON

Something like, "I loved my  
grandfather *but I condemn many of  
his beliefs*. He taught me a lot of  
*how not to be*." Gotta love editing.

JESSICA

South Carolinians For Humanity?

LEON

(pleased with himself)

That was mine. Filed it as a 527 in Charleston. It'll never come back on us. Or the campaign.

JESSICA

(matter of fact)

Ever think we're all going to hell?

LEON

Hey, go negative or go home.

JESSICA

I'd love to be a fly on the wall at the governor's mansion right now.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

JESSIE MATTHEWS, 70, stares at a television in disbelief. He is watching the tail end of the ad we just saw. He is not nearly the monster the ad leads us to believe. He is an elder southern gentleman most times. Right now, he is pissed off.

Two AIDES and his CAMPAIGN MANAGER attempt to console.

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

It aired last night during "Big Bang Theory."

MATTHEWS

Son of a bitch! You live to be a certain age and you think you have seen it all. But, God damnit.

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

Senator Matthews, your base knows this isn't you.

MATTHEWS

Fuck the base. Hell, that ad probably secured some of the base. I need more than the base to win re-election this time out. That's the kind of knee-jerk shit that motivates the swing voters that stayed home for the last cycle. I'm not a racist. My record proves that. I denounced my grandfather's klan shit more than forty-five years ago. That made it look like I was the little Klan kid, right?

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

We will call a press conference for this afternoon. We'll demand a retraction. We'll do a satellite hook up with -- who would be good?-- Anderson Cooper. We'll get them to pull the ad.

MATTHEWS

Oh, the ads already pulled. They'll let every goddamn news station play it for free a hundred fucking times for the next 48 hours. Anderson Cooper ain't gonna save this? You can't throw a skunk into the room and then ask people not to smell it. Spence'll come out against it. He will say he had no knowledge of it and then sit back and reap all the benefits.

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

(frenzied)

What about "The View?" If you can convince Whoopi you're not a racist, that might --

MATTHEWS

(enough)

I'm not a racist!

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

Exactly.

MATTHEWS

What lowlife, race baiting, mudslinging, sucker of Satan's cock is behind that ad?

(beat)

And, more importantly, why isn't he working for us?

PRE-LAP: The first few chords of George Thorogood's "BAD TO THE BONE."

EXT. 1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - DAY

ECU: Fitz, the man behind the ad, jauntily walking down Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. Ear buds in, he is strutting to the Thorogood song. Life is good. And, man, he loves this town.

WIDER: Fitz comes upon a FAMILY of FIVE standing by the White House gate. The DAD is ready to take a vacation picture of his wife and three daughters.

FITZ  
Hey, can I take that for you?

DAD  
Would you? That'd be great.

Fitz takes the camera as the Dad gets in position.

FITZ  
Where are you guys from?

DAD  
Keokuk, Iowa.

FITZ  
Lee County.

MOM  
(impressed)  
Yes. Are you from Iowa?

Fitz is having a problem with the camera.

FITZ  
How do you, uh?

The Dad comes back over to show him what button to push.

FITZ (CONT'D)  
No. I'm from D.C. Born and raised.  
I've just spent some time in Iowa.  
You ever eat at Ogo's?

The entire family lights up. He knows Ogo's?

DAUGHTER  
Oh my god, that's my favorite  
restaurant. How do you know Ogo's?

Dad runs back to pose.

FITZ  
My work takes me to Iowa now and  
again. How long are you in town?  
Say, "Keokuk."

FAMILY  
(smiling)  
Keokuk.

Fitz snaps a few shots on the digital camera.

DAD

A week. Trying to see it all.

FITZ

You should call Joni Ernst's senate office and set up a visit. They do that for constituents. Photo op for both of you. She's in the Russell Senate Office Building over on the corner of Constitution and First.

MOM

Do you know her?

This makes Fitz smile. He hands Dad his camera.

FITZ

In a manner of speaking. Give her a call. She hosts a breakfast for visiting Iowans on Wednesdays. She'll give you a pen. And enjoy your visit in my fair city.

Fitz walks away happily.

MOM

What a nice man.

INT. RESIDENTIAL HOME - TOPEKA, KANSAS

Opulent. These are rich people. ELIZABETH CONROY, 40, sits on a jewelry box sofa taking solace in a MARTINI and watching her husband, CONGRESSMAN BILL CONROY, 50, rant on the SPEAKER PHONE. She has been crying.

BILL CONROY

(incensed)

I want that cocksucker dead. Jesus fucking Christ. Who does that? Rhonda has been my campaign manager since I was a junior state senator. And to imply that I knocked her up is disgraceful to her, disgraceful to me, disgraceful to her family and disgraceful to my kids and my wife of twenty-two years. We need to nip this in the bud right this fucking instant.

Elizabeth clicks on the television with a remote control.

ELIZABETH CONROY

(upset)

Language. Calm down, Bill. You are going to have a heart attack. I'm going to have a nervous breakdown.

VOICE ON SPEAKERPHONE

(filtered)

The minute you address this it becomes a thing. Right now it is speculation and rumor. Back fence conversation. Water cooler. Leave it that way. You know that. This is nothing new. Remember McCain?

BILL CONROY

A reporter called the house and asked Elizabeth if she had any comment regarding the speculation that I was the father of Rhonda's baby. I'm supposed to leave that alone? They called the house!

VOICE ON SPEAKERPHONE

(filtered)

What did she say?

ELIZABETH CONROY

(toward phone; losing it)

I said, "No comment." What the hell was I supposed to say, Ed?

VOICE ON SPEAKERPHONE

Good girl. From now on, if asked, you say this: "I have been happily married for twenty-nine years and I will not dignify ugly rumors and unfounded speculation with a response." Got that? But only if asked. Do not, under any circumstances, address the issue with a denial. Don't add fuel to the fire. You come out and deny it and people wonder if there is something there.

ANGLE ON: TV SET. A news report on a wildfire in Arizona.

BILL CONROY

This is unconscionable. I mean, I mean, Rhonda's not even my type.

Off Elizabeth's glare. He has a type?

INT. UNDERGROUND U.S. CAPITOL SUBWAY STATION

We are under the Russel Senate Office Building at the platform where Senators take the dedicated monorail to the Capitol for votes. Fitz leans against the wall, working on his iPad, waiting for the train to arrive.

ANGLE ON IPAD IMAGE: Fitz is flipping through digital PHOTOS of Congressman Bill Conroy at various events. He finds one where Conroy is standing next to a very pregnant RHONDA PIERCE. Then another. Then one where Conroy is playfully rubbing her belly. He crops the photo so it looks more intimate than it is. Hits save.

The CAPITOL SUBWAY CAR APPROACHES. Fitz scans the disembarking Senators until he sees:

FITZ

Senator Bailey? Senator? Over here.

SENATOR JAMES BAILEY, 60s, gets off the train looking harried. A former Green Beret and career politician he is smooth as polished glass and movie star handsome with a proper Republican haircut. He extends his hand.

SENATOR BAILEY

Fitz? Good of you to come. I gotta get up to the office quick. What's the latest news on the fire?

FITZ

Ten percent contained last I heard.

TRAVELLING: The two men walk quickly, up the stairs and down the hallway.

SENATOR BAILEY

Just what I needed. I'm catching a flight back to Phoenix this afternoon. I have a shit storm brewing in the judiciary committee right now.

(smiles)

Chuck Grassley still really, really hates you by the way.

FITZ

Occupational hazard.

SENATOR BAILEY

And now my state is on fire. I tell you, its never dull.

A JUNIOR SENATOR passes in the opposite direction.

JUNIOR SENATOR  
 (in passing)  
 Good luck with that fire, Jimmy.

SENATOR BAILEY  
 (to Junior Senator)  
 Thanks. Appreciate that.  
 (to Fitz)  
 I am blanking on that guy's name.

FITZ  
 Lance Montalto. Junior Senator.  
 Ohio. Took Roberts' seat.

SENATOR BAILEY  
 (impressed)  
 You're good. So How is Jenna and,  
 your son is Joey, right?

FITZ  
 (right back atcha)  
 You're good. They're fine. Thank  
 you, Senator.

The two men turn, open the door and enter:

INT. SENATOR BAILEY'S OUTER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

We are immediately hit by the NEWS REPORT coming from the television. Several AIDES and PAGES are gathered in the front office. A large ARIZONA flag hangs on the wall behind a SECRETARY.

TELEVISION  
 ... the rough terrain is making it  
 near impossible for firefighters to  
 get to the blaze.

The image on the television is that of an INFERNO. A HELICOPTER dumps a load of RED PHOSPHOROUS.

SENATOR BAILEY  
 Jesus Christ! Status?

AIDE  
 There are actually three fires now.

SENATOR BAILEY  
 Fuck me.

AIDE  
 Senator Kyle's office called. He is  
 headed back tomorrow.

SENATOR BAILEY

Well he's not in an election cycle. Get me out this afternoon. Get the White House on the horn so I can speak to the President. I need five minutes with Mr. Quinlan. Alone.

INT. SENATOR BAILEY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Senator opens the top drawer of his large mahogany desk and takes out an ashtray, lighter and a pack of CIGARETTES. Fitz closes the door behind them.

SENATOR BAILEY

(re: cigarettes)

Our secret.

The Senator lights a cigarette, inhales deeply. Then:

SENATOR BAILEY (CONT'D)

She's upticking. You see the polls?

FITZ

The uptick is an anomaly caused by her media events.

SENATOR BAILEY

Media events? She's running a three-ring fucking circus! The media's following her bus around the state like G.I.'s on free blowjob day at Madam Ying's. "Take Arizona back?" Give me a fucking break. "Make mine Melora?" I thought we had put that border fence shit behind us. It won't work. Arizonans kow that. Trump's even realizing that. In private anyway. He's just going to build a little for show. But now she's bringing it up at her roadside barbecues three times a day which has Kyle paying it lip service. I won't switch my position based on which way the breeze is blowing.

INTERCOM BUZZES.

SECRETARY (O.C.)

(over intercom)

Sorry to bother you, Senator. Madeleine Westerhout just called back. We are to expect a call from the President in five minutes.

SENATOR BAILEY

(into intercom)

Thanks, Carol. Patch it through.

(to Fitz)

I'm gonna have to take that.

FITZ

(duh)

Yeah, no shit.

SENATOR BAILEY

Look, you and I have bumped heads in the past. Too negative too fast. Too many ad hominem attacks as opposed to issue based. Well, I'm gonna tell you something. All holds are off. I want you to take care of my Melora Dandridge problem the way you see fit. I don't need to see push poll questions or 527s. Swift boat her all you want. I want plausible deniability here.

FITZ

Sweep the leg.

SENATOR BAILEY

More than that. Neutralize this cunt. As we say in the Berets: with extreme prejudice.

Fitz is trying hard not to smile. He is loving this.

FITZ

With extreme prejudice.

Senator Bailey and Fitz maintain eye contact for several beats. Senator Baily snuffs out his cigarette.

SENATOR BAILEY

Now if you'll excuse me, I need to speak with the President of the United States. My state is on fire.

INT. LOW RENT OFFICE SPACE - DAY

Long tables and chairs are lined up in a large empty space. TWO WORKERS are placing a CELL PHONE and a SCRIPT in front of each empty chair. Across the top of the script "KANSAS" has been hand written. The phones are being pulled from a box with the Kansas area code "913" hand written across it. Off to the side we see several boxes all labeled with different area codes.

Leon is talking to PIERCE, 30, Black. Gay.

LEON

It is important that none of them sound Black on the phone. Feel me?

PIERCE

(effeminate)

I can assure you that will not be the case. You said it was important that they were articulate, so, while many of them are African-American -- OK, all of them, this is D.C. -- I only reached out to people from my acting class and their friends. They all auditioned.

LEON

Good. Good. It is important that they sound like they are from the place we are calling. Tomorrow is Kansas. I have been to Kansas. There ain't a whole helluva lot of Black people in Kansas. In the afternoon, we are calling Wyoming. Wyoming makes Kansas look like South East Washington. Got it? I need them to sound white. And straight. White and straight. Not a lot of gays there either.

Pierce gets it. He's insulted, but he gets it.

EXT. RUSSEL STATE SENATE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Fitz is exiting the building and encounters a nice-looking, professionally dressed WOMAN, 25. They get eye contact. Fitz senses recognition. Smiles.

WOMAN

Are you John Quinlan?

FITZ

(almost flirty)

Yeah, sure, that's me, but my friends call me Fitz.

The Woman SLAPS his face so hard that the imprint of her hand will be there for hours. This was not an empty gesture. This was an assault. She then KNEES him in the crotch with such force you'd think his balls bounced off the roof of his mouth. Fitz goes down.

The Woman stands over him trembling with rage. In the distance we see a SECURITY OFFICER run over to assist.

WOMAN

I have been waiting a long time to do that. That's for my brother you piece of shit. How do you live with yourself?

The Woman storms away.

SECURITY OFFICER

(to Woman)

Are you alright, Miss Sullivan?

Fitz struggles to sit up. He can't yet.

FITZ

Oh, by all means, make sure SHE is alright.

SECURITY OFFICER

(to Fitz)

Are you OK, sir?

Fitz stands up. Watches the woman walk away. She IS pretty.

FITZ

Occupational hazard. Did I hear you say Sullivan? What? Shelby Sullivan's daughter. Republican from Tennessee. She grew up nice.

SECURITY OFFICER

(puzzled)

Nice? You call that nice?

FITZ

To look at. Nice to look at. No, yeah, a little mean for my taste. And I don't like them that strong.

Fitz is slowly getting all his wits back about him.

FITZ (CONT'D)

Her dad lost his seat, shit, what was it, twelve years ago? What's she doing here?

SECURITY OFFICER

She's an aide to Senator Royce. You know each other?

FITZ

In a manner of speaking. As my grandfather used to say, I think she is suffering from Irish Alzheimer's. You forget everything but the grudges.

SECURITY OFFICER

You strike me as one of those guys that should just wear a cup all the time.

Fitz nods and rubs the side of his face.

FITZ

No doubt.

EXT. ARIZONA MEXICAN BORDER - DAY

MELORA DANDRIDGE, 35, is standing next to her Tour Bus. AIDES are busy manning two large portable BARBECUES grilling up ribs, burgers and hot dogs to feed her STAFF, a few FOLLOWERS and the PRESS POOL.

Melora -- wearing a "MAKE MINE MELORA" T-shirt that has been stylishly ripped to show a little cleavage -- takes two plates of barbecue to a couple of REPORTERS.

MELORA

Everybody gettin' enough to eat.  
Edgar? Leonard? We have plenty.

She has them eating off her paper plates... and right out her hand. Every instinct tells the reporters, and us, to hate her. She is gorgeous, never had to diet in her life, lives by the code of oversimplification and speaks her mind immediately and without thinking. It is part of why she is upticking. She is the "breath of fresh air" cliché. And the queen of the sound bite.

MELORA (CONT'D)

(playing the crowd)

The other day, this fella asked me why I didn't run for Senator in the last cycle. Well, heck, that's easy: it's because I wasn't old enough, silly.

A REPORTER, in mid-bite, turns on his tape recorder.

REPORTER

What does that say to experience?  
Maybe you still aren't old enough.

Melora puts her hands on her hips and tilts her head. This is her standard pose when questioned. It also gives the TELEVISION PHOTOGRAPHERS a chance to get their cameras on her. Once they do:

MELORA

Now Jim, are you saying that being on the Tucson city council, running my own successful business, representing this great state as Miss Arizona before completing my law degree and becoming a successful practicing attorney has not prepared me to fight for what is right for our friends and neighbors in the greatest state in the union? Because if you are, I know a lot of Arizonans who think you are more full of beans than that plate you're holding. That's your second helping, too. Glad your riding in one of the vans with the other reporters.

With a smile on her face, Melora waves her hand in front of her face to simulate a reaction to a fart. It shouldn't, but it gets a laugh.

REPORTER

Any comment about the three fires currently ravaging Arizona?

Melora puts her hands on her hips and tilts her head.

INT. FITZ'S GEORGETOWN TOWN HOME - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

MATCHING SHOT: Melora in her pre-answer position except she is on the TELEVISION SET on Fitz's bedroom wall.

MELORA

(on television)

Well, I tell ya, I am standing here on the Arizona-Mexico border and I do not see any fires over there in Mexico. Do you? Anybody see any? Yeah, me neither. A lot of the fires started here, and I bet these were started the same way, evidence will bare this out, a lot of these fires are started by people that have snuck into this country by crossing our border illegally.

Fitz dressed for bed, working on his LAPTOP and watching Melora on TV. A WOMAN is UNDER THE COVERS deep asleep.

FITZ  
(amused)  
Jesus, she's a piece of work.

MELORA  
(on television)  
So the way to extinguish wildfires  
in the great state of Arizona is to  
strengthen our borders.

Fitz stares intently at the TV. He sees something we don't. A smile creeps across his face. He scribbles something on a legal pad.

ANGLE ON TV: Melora is standing on the border looking South so that the camera gets a really good look at her rear end.

MELORA (CONT'D)  
(on television)  
We need a fence. Right here. I'll  
even show President Trump where to  
put it.

Melora bends over and draws a line in the sand giving a great view of one of her chief assets.

FITZ  
(re: TV)  
Now that is a nice ass!

JENNA  
(from under the covers)  
Thank you, Honey, but I'm really,  
really tired. In the morning maybe?

Off Fitz' smile.

INT. FITZ'S STUDY - 3:45 A.M.

CLOSE ON: FOUR CLOCKS on the wall. They show it is: 3:45 in D.C.; 2:45 in DALLAS; 1:45 in DENVER; 12:45 in LOS ANGELES. The country is asleep. But not Fitz.

WIDER: Fitz's office is a hybrid of successful businessman and college fraternity. Redskin and National's sports memorabilia are mixed with photos of Fitz and Washington politicians. THREE TELEVISIONS are on the wall, each muted and displaying the CLOSED CAPTIONING. All tuned to news stations.

On his desk is a large DESKTOP COMPUTER, two LAPTOPS, an IPAD and a stack of LEGAL PADS. The tools of his trade.

Fitz downs a RED BULL and tosses the empty into a garbage can containing three other dead soldiers. He picks up a GUITAR and PLAYS an opening BLUES RIFF. He is thinking. Getting into his zone.

MUSIC: A HEAVY BLUES RIFF PLAYS OVER THE FOLLOWING

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Fitz furiously typing on his DESKTOP COMPUTER.
- Fitz sitting in a Washington Redskins BEANBAG chair scribbling on a LEGAL PAD.
- ECU: LEGAL PAD. Under the heading PUSH POLL QUESTIONS Fitz has written "Would you be more or less likely to vote for Melora Dandridge if you knew:" followed by the words: Abortion? Tax cheat? Infidelity? Boob job? Lesbian?" Fitz smiles at the possibilities. Writes the word "FIRE" and underlines it.
- Fitz, at computer, Googles the Columbia, S.C. Chapter of the NAACP. Writes down the phone number.
- Fitz repeatedly throwing a baseball up in the air and catching it.
- Back to work: Fitz on his computer going frame by frame through a video of Bill Conroy on his FINAL CUT EXPRESS. He finds a very unflattering FRAME that makes Conroy appear evil. Fitz CAPTURES it with the click of his mouse.
- Fitz looking at a computer map of the fires in Arizona. He looks over an ITINERARY for Melora Dandridge and measures a distance on the map with his fingers.
- Taking a break. Fitz chooses a song with his foot on a DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION game hooked up to the center television. We cut away before we see if he is any good.
- Back in the beanbag chair Fitz is writing a list on another legal pad under the heading: "ARIZONA WEDGE ISSUES." We see: "Economy; Illegals; Border Fence" etc.
- Fitz back at the computer typing furiously. He PAUSES. Distracted. Something is bothering him. He opens GOOGLE and types.
- ECU: MONITOR. We see the words: "SHELBY SULLIVAN; TENNESSEE; SON" being typed in. SEARCH is pressed. We SEE the RESULTS PAGE being scrolled down to: "Former Senator's Son Dies of Drug Overdose."
- Reverse Angle: As Fitz reads the story.

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

A CELLPHONE vibrates and rings on the night stand. The ringtone is AC/DC's "DIRTY DEEDS DONE DIRT CHEAP." A Black Man's hand reaches over and grabs it. Leon's hand.

LEON

(into phone; groggy)  
For fuck's sake, Fitz. I'm not even going to ask if you know what time it is because I know you don't and I don't even want to know.

Leon gets out of the bed and attempts to sneak out without disturbing his sleeping wife, MARTA.

MARTA

Tell that insomniac motherfucker that normal people need eight hours of sleep a night.

Marta flips over and violently tries to go back to sleep.

LEON

Marta says, "Hi."

INTERCUT: LEON'S HOUSE/FITZ'S STUDY

FITZ

I lost track of time. I've been working.

Leon has made it into the hallway.

LEON

I'm sure you did. I'm sure you are.

FITZ

I have new pages for the push polls. We have Arizona phones?

LEON

Yeah. Fifty of them.

FITZ

Good. We need to get some talk radio action on Melora. The fire's the lead story across the board.

LEON

This couldn't wait until, I don't know, until the sun came up?

FITZ

No rest for the weary, Leon. I have a new still photo on Conroy for the direct mailer. Makes him look evil as hell. That reminds me, I want to get twenty or thirty expectant mothers at that Topeka rally. Third trimester gals.

LEON

What? Pro-lifers?

FITZ

Nah, something different.

LEON

Do I want to know?

FITZ

Probably not. We'll do a conference call with Greta tomorrow.

The conversation eases into the comfortable. They have been friends for almost thirty years.

LEON

It is tomorrow, Motherfucker.

FITZ

Oh, yeah, right. Sorry.

LEON

Don't you have a personal assistant that is supposed to be at your beck and call at every odd goddamn hour of the night. Beckon her.

FITZ

(smiling)

Yeah, but she doesn't know me like you do. Plus, she's new so I am breaking her in slowly.

LEON

How'd it go with Bailey?

FITZ

You aren't gonna believe this shit. All holds are off.

LEON

No way!

FITZ

I can do what I want, how I want.

LEON

You ultimately do anyway.

FITZ

He told me to take out Melora Dandridge as I see fit. Wants plausible deniability. Told me to take her out, ready for this, with extreme prejudice.

LEON

Man, and it wasn't even your birthday.

FITZ

He even called her a cunt.

LEON

No shit? Mister "never swears?"  
Mister "I take the high road?"

FITZ

He's running scared.

LEON

She's a first class flake. She is, however, smoking hot. If I was a single man, Fitzie.

FITZ

Never vote with your dick, Leon.

LEON

It would be a different world if the penis had the right to vote. Maybe we should lobby for an amendment to the constitution.

FITZ

And she's not just political hot. Like Sarah Palin. Or Michele Bachman. Or Kirsten Gillibrand. She's hot in any category. She's like Angelina Jolie or Margot Robbie hot. See her ass? And those lips?

LEON

(playful)

Uh oh, my penis is fixin' to register to vote.

Leon turns to see Marta standing in the hall. Tired and pissed off.

MARTA

Tell me, Leon, is your penis a democrat or a republican?

Fitz is enjoying this.

FITZ

Busted. Tell her your penis is an independent. A swing voter.

Marta hears him through the phone.

MARTA

Oh, it is independent alright. And it is going to remain independent for a long time. Swinging all by its lonesome.

Marta storms back to her room.

LEON

Marta, sweetie.

Their bedroom door SLAMS. Fitz finds this quite humorous.

LEON (CONT'D)

(to Fitz)

Thank you. Thank you very much.

FITZ

Sorry, pal.

LEON

Anything else you need to discuss at --

Leon looks at the hallway clock reading 4:50.

LEON (CONT'D)

-- god damnit. I get up in an hour and forty minutes.

FITZ

(change of tone)

Remember Shelby Sullivan?

LEON

Yeah, Tennessee. Hartman campaign.

FITZ

I saw his daughter today.

LEON

(amused)

I heard. Small town, remember?

FITZ

Did you know his kid was an O.D.?

LEON

(suddenly somber)

Yeah. I knew. A year or two after.

FITZ

Did we have something to do with that do you think? You know, the push polls? The fliers? That one ad we ran. It did get ugly.

LEON

It always gets ugly.

(long pause)

Look, Fitzie, the kid was using. Who's to say? A shitload of other kids overdose and their families can't blame it on an opposition research team or having a daddy in the public arena.

FITZ

I just remember you said to back off and, as usual, I didn't listen. And, well, seeing the sister yesterday sort of...

LEON

Look. You're tired. We're in the shit right now. Things get emotional. The stakes are high in this game. Sullivan was in no position to be in office with all that personal shit going on at home so you just informed the public about it. If he'd been a better father he'd have been a better Senator. Hartman was the better man.

FITZ

You believe that?

LEON

(he doesn't)

I do.

FITZ  
Yeah. Me, too. Just seeing her --

LEON  
Go to sleep. Grab an hour. It'll  
look better tomorrow.

FITZ  
(after a beat)  
It is tomorrow.

INT. SCHADENFREUDE OFFICE - MORNING

Georgia is answering the perpetually ringing phone. The office is busier today. Lots going on. Several extremely attractive, female ASSISTANTS go in and out of offices.

GEORGIA  
(into headset)  
Schadenfreude, good morning. Yes,  
Congressman Hirelva. I'll transfer  
you right now.

A DISTINGUISHED MAN with an expensive WALKING STICK, 60s, and well dressed WOMAN, 40s, enter through the glass doors. Georgia looks up and gestures she will be right with them.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)  
(into headset)  
Fitz, Congressman Hirelva on two.

The Man and Woman survey the offices. The Man notes the attractive young things working there. Georgia included.

DISTINGUISHED MAN  
Looks like the Playboy mansion.

WOMAN  
Fitz always did like to surround  
himself with youth and beauty.

DISTINGUISHED MAN  
Appropriately paradoxical.

GEORGIA  
May I help you?

DISTINGUISHED MAN  
We would like to see Fitz?

GEORGIA  
And you are?

INT. FITZ'S SCHADENFREUDE OFFICE - A MINUTE LATER

A far cry from his office at home. It has three FLAT SCREENS on the wall but this office was decorated by a professional. Sofas and chairs for clients, wet bar and, on the wall, a LARGE FRAMED photograph of the DAISY GIRL.

Fitz is behind his mahogany desk. Just under the Daisy Girl. Talking on the phone.

FITZ

(into phone)

We have him on the ropes  
Congressman. Think of it as a  
prizefight. When your opponent is  
showing signs of weakness you don't  
voluntarily go to your neutral  
corner. You hit even harder.

Fitz' assistant, ANNETTE, young and pretty (they always are) enters quietly. Waiting for a moment to speak.

FITZ (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Attack, attack, attack. It is what  
you are paying me to do.

Fitz covers the receiver and gestures "What" to Annette.

ANNETTE

(apologetic)

You have a Margaret Dannemiller and  
Walter O'Leary here to see you.

INT. FITZ'S OFFICE - TEN MINUTES LATER

FITZ

It has been a long time.

WALTER O'LEARY and MARGARET DANNEMILLER, from the lobby, sit across from Fitz in what appears to be an awkward reunion for all three of them.

WALTER

The world of opposition research  
seems to be treating you well.

FITZ

Few complaints.

WALTER

From you perhaps. I believe I have  
read a few from those you have  
opposed over the years.

Normally Fitz wouldn't suffer a comment like that easily but there appears to be a respectful, albeit cold, history here.

MARGARET

(trying to lighten things)  
You are looking good, Fitz.

FITZ

You as well, Margo. Still fighting the good fight?

WALTER

I remember warning you that it wasn't the right path. A waste of your intelligence and charisma. I always pegged you as a man who would end up finding the perfect candidate and taking him, or her, to the White House. Chief of Staff seemed like the job for you. The power of the puppet master. A Jiminy Cricket to some Kennedyesque Pinnochio.

FITZ

Your age is showing, Walt. No one says Kennedyesque anymore.

WALTER

I always felt like Ed Rollins and I were fighting for possession of your soul back in 1986. You weren't the only protege I lost to the Atwater camp and the post Reagan Revolution but you were the biggest surprise. Never really saw you as the Machiavellian type. Who knew you would become so specialized?

FITZ

(pointed)  
How is Michael Dukakis these days?

Margaret changes the course of conversation.

MARGARET

As much as I am enjoying this trip down memory lane, we are here for a reason. Are you representing a presidential candidate yet?

This is getting interesting.

FITZ

It's a little early in the season don't ya think? But I assume you know the answer to that or I you wouldn't be here.

(to Walter)

Nostalgia notwithstanding.

MARGARET

We have a candidate. Hasn't announced yet. His name has been mentioned by no one.

FITZ

Sounds like a real winner.

WALTER

Oh, wait. It gets better.

MARGARET

He has never held public office. He is a registered Republican --

FITZ

New territory for you, Walter.

WALTER

-A pro-life, non-denominational, no skeletons in the closet Republican. He is a moderate. Part Libertarian, part Jeffersonian Democrat and part middle of the road Republican. A little "r" not a capital "R." He is a voice of reason. A voice of the people. But seeing as we have a Republican in the White House he will be running as an Independent.

Fitz feels like he is in the Twilight Zone.

FITZ

I often wondered what happened to the two of you over the years and now I am guessing it is a combination of mental illness and serious, serious drug abuse.

(beat; tries to read them)

An Independent? I'm a little busy here working for candidates that have a hope in hell of actually getting elected. So --

WALTER

Oh, he's electable.

FITZ

Come off it, Walter. There have only been four presidents that hadn't previously held elected office. Dwight Eisenhower, Ulysses Grant and Zachary Taylor. At least they were all military generals. And the fourth, of course, is our current leader and I think we are all seeing how well that is working out. Has Pence measured the Oval for curtains yet?

WALTER

You're forgetting General George Washington.

FITZ

Well there wasn't exactly a presidential precedent for that, was there?

MARGARET

It isn't totally without precedent. Steve Forbes, Ross Perot, Ralph Nader --

FITZ

Really? Nader? You want to use Nader in your argument.

WALTER

I remember sitting in an airport bar with you, before you went Atwater on me, and we were contemplating the great "what ifs" of American politics. Remember building the perfect candidate? Frankensteining all the qualities we admired? Fiscal conservative; social moderate; military experience but not a career warrior; successful businessman; logical environmentalist; smart; non-elitist; dual party friendly. We even started writing these qualities down on a cocktail napkin. Several cocktail napkins.

FITZ

Let me guess: You still have the napkin?

WALTER

Better. I have the candidate.

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - KANSAS - MORNING

A dais is set up for a political rally. A technician TAPS the microphone a few times. A few hundred CITIZENS mill about. Signs tell us this is a "RE-ELECT BILL CONROY" event. A very pregnant RHONDA, 40, places a speech on the podium.

ANGLE ON: A WHITE VAN filled with WOMEN pulls onto the lot.

EXT/INT: GOVERNOR'S MANSION - SOUTH CAROLINA - SIMULTANEOUS

A press conference is being set up just outside the Mansion. A TECHNICIAN taps the free standing microphone.

Governor Matthews stands at the window looking out. His Campaign Manager is on a cellphone.

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

"The View" is a no go.

EXT. A WALMART PARKING LOT - ARIZONA

The Melora Dandridge Tour Bus is parked and the barbecue is a blazing. Melora, looking especially hot in tight jeans and a tight gingham shirt, places her hands on her hips, tilts her head and starts in. She hasn't even made it to the platform and microphone she is to speak from. She is being down-homey.

MELORA

I do have the experience for this job. I served on the Tucson city council, while running my own successful business, I represented this great state as Miss Arizona before getting my law degree and becoming a successful practicing attorney. I'd say that is a pretty fine resume, is it not?

CITIZEN

(yelling out)

I'd say you're pretty fine.

The crowd laughs.

MELORA

(aw shucks)

I'd say you're pretty fine, too.

INT. LOW RENT OFFICE SPACE - S.E. WASHINGTON - SIMULTANEOUS

Sixty AFRICAN-AMERICANS are manning the cell phones. There is the background BUZZ of conversation like when you call tech support in India. Each long table has a sign delineating the state they are calling: KANSAS, ARIZONA, SOUTH CAROLINA, WYOMING.

As the CAM slowly pans down the tables we see that each pollster is reading from copy on the table in front of them. Fitz's copy. We hear snippets of their push-polling.

POLLSTER #1

Good morning, I am calling on behalf of Kansans for the American Truth and I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions --

POLLSTER #2

-- you indicated that you would be voting to re-elect Senator Conroy, and we love that by the way, but let me ask you: would you be more likely or less likely to vote for Senator Conroy if you were to learn he had fathered an illegitimate child with one of his staffers?

We notice that the Pollsters are following instruction and doing their level headed best to... sound White.

POLLSTER #3

(in faux White voice)

-- more likely or less likely to continue your support of Governor Matthews if you were to learn he had been a member of a hate group? Such as the American Nazi Party, the Skinheads, Aryan Brotherhood or the Ku Klux Klan?

POLLSTER #4

(in faux White voice)

More likely or less likely if you were to learn that he still shared the hate group's beliefs? Such as the American Nazi Party, the Skinheads, Aryan Brotherhood or the Ku Klux Klan?

INT. FITZ'S SCHADENFREUDE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The conversation between the three old "friends" has been continuous.

MARGARET

Money is no object. Our candidate has deep pockets and the grass roots organizations coming on board have pockets of almost equal depth.

WALTER

The country is in trouble, Fitz. Hell, you know that. And I think we all share some responsibility in that. And by "we all" I mean all of us: the government, politicians, the parties, the American people. But most of all, us, the people that put these people in office. We became so obsessed with playing the game that we forgot that ultimately... it isn't a game. It is real life. I'm embarrassed that Hilary and Trump were the offerings last time. I want to change that. We need to change that. They are making bad decisions that will affect your son. And his sons. What happens when they get into the workplace? What will the world be like?

INT. TELEVISION NEWS ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

A middle-aged TELEVISION PRODUCER is sitting at a computer reading an e-mail. He grabs a SUPERVISING PRODUCER that is walking by.

TELEVISION PRODUCER

Jesus Christ, take a look at this.

The Senior Producer leans over and reads the e-mail.

SUPERVISING PRODUCER

Oh that's horse shit! "An undisclosed source close to the investigation?" We can't go with that.

(beat; considering)

Unless another outlet reports it first. Or the candidate addresses the issue unprovoked by us. Without proof, it is just speculative rumor. You know, horse shit. Save that Quicktime just in case.

(beat; considering)

You know what, send it to editing just in case.

(MORE)

## SUPERVISING PRODUCER (CONT'D)

So they can render it and have it ready. But it's horse shit.

(hoping it's not)

Yeah, it's horse shit.

## INT. SCHADENFREUDE CONFERENCE ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Leon, Jessica and the entire Schadenfreude STAFF are gathered watching several FLAT SCREENS on the wall. It is the anticipatory calm before the storm. Among the young, hot Assistants is Fitz's assistant, Annette.

LEON

Where's Fitz?

ANNETTE

He took an unscheduled meeting.

LEON

Now? He can't miss this. Who's he meeting with?

ANNETTE

A Mister Walter O'Leary and a Miss Margaret Dannemiller. They were walk-ins.

Leon and Jessica stare at each other for a moment.

LEON

(slowly; curious)

Mo-ther-fuck-er!

## INT. FITZ'S SCHADENFREUDE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Contemplative, Fitz has been silent for a while. Almost more than Walter and Margaret could have hoped for.

MARGARET

Oh, this is happening. We have already assembled the majority of the team. Walter is campaign manager. With my assist. We have Marsh and Associates heading fund-raising, Danny Ortega and his team for speech writing, Randy Lewis for media buys --

Fitz is impressed. All heavy hitters.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

-- Titelman and Associates for legal, Jake Edwards for Hustings, Lance Montgomery for social media --

WALTER

It is an elite all-star team. And we want you... to head opposition research.

FITZ

I didn't think you were a fan.

WALTER

I'm not. But I am also a pragmatist.

MARGARET

We are aware that you are committed to quite a few --

WALTER

Too many, if you ask me.

MARGARET

-- campaigns in an official capacity. We understand your commitment to them and simply ask that you limit taking on additional clients for the next twelve months. With an option to extend that should we do as well as we expect in Iowa. We have outlined a staff budget for you but you will have full authority to hire who you want. Your current Schadenfreude staff is acceptable but you may need to add bodies. The main thing is we want you. We would like you to commit by end of business tomorrow.

WALTER

You are our first choice, Fitz, however, based on our history, we have set up other meetings.

Fitz, maybe for the first time in his life, is speechless. After a very long pause:

FITZ

Wow. I gotta say, I appreciate your enthusiasm. And I am a huge fan of deep pockets. But, seriously, this, and your guy, sounds a little too good to be true.

WALTER

At the risk of sounding maudlin,  
doesn't the greatest country in the  
world deserve just that: something  
that is too good to be true?

QUICK SHOTS:

- Governor Matthews opens the door of the mansion and begins walking toward the microphone and the awaiting crowd.

- Senator Bill Conroy opens the door of his car and heads toward the dais and the awaiting crowd. His long suffering wife, Elizabeth, follows a step behind.

- Melora Dandridge, looking like America's darling, walks up the wooden steps to her platform and the waiting microphone.

BACK ON: FITZ IN HIS OFFICE

FITZ

(really saying no)

It is tempting. I have to think about it. I need to have a little more information on your guy. You know, like his name and shit. But, I gotta tell you, it is a tough field. There is blood in the water. Some of these guys, even some of the girls, they, uh, they are gonna be tough to beat. They are like Edwin Edwards. Remember him? From Louisiana? Four term governor. He said, "The only way I can lose this election is if I'm caught in bed with either a dead girl or a live boy."

WALTER

That's why we need you to do what you do best.

FITZ

Yeah, and what's that?

WALTER

(serious)

Put dead boys in their beds.

And with that, we SMASH CUT to the following scenes. One quickly followed by the other:

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - COLUMBUS, SOUTH CAROLINA

Governor Matthews is mid-speech. A large GROUP of AFRICAN-AMERICANS pushes forward through the crowd of JOURNALISTS and Matthew's SUPPORTERS.

MATTHEWS

-- that I am not a racist. My record clearly supports the fact that I have fought for the rights of all South Carolinians.

There is shoving amongst the crowd. Two young AFRICAN-AMERICAN men unfurl a banner reading: "YOUR GRANDPA LYNCHED MY GRANDPA." Signs spring up reading: "RECALL THE RACIST" and "THIS NIGGER VOTES."

TWO of Matthews SUPPORTERS try to tear down the banner and are shoved to the ground. That spark ignites more shoving and name calling until, as would be expected, the first punch is thrown.

MATTHEWS (CONT'D)

Stop that! Stop. No, please. Let's talk this out.

Matthews voice is cracking under the pressure and the ugly melee that is unfolding.

MATTHEWS (CONT'D)

This isn't what we want! We're in this together.

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - KANSAS

Bill Conroy and his wife stand by as they are introduced by very pregnant Campaign Manager Rhonda. It is a big crowd with mostly WOMEN up toward the front of the dais.

RHONDA

It gives me great pleasure to introduce, the distinguished gentleman from Kansas. Of Kansas. For Kansas. Your Senator... Bill Conroy.

The CROWD erupts in CHEERS as the Conroys take the stage smiling and waving.

As Conroy takes the microphone --

BILL CONROY

What a great day for Kansas. I am Bill Conroy and I am your Senator.

-- THIRTY PREGNANT WOMEN in the front of the crowd take off their jackets to reveal T-SHIRTS that read: "This one is Bill's Baby, Too." and "I slept with my United States Senator and all I got was this baby."

Elizabeth shrieks with humiliation. Rhonda is dumbfounded. Bill Conroy, ever the politician, tries to spin it.

BILL CONROY (CONT'D)

That's very funny, Ladies. But this isn't the time for jokes.

The Pregnant Women start chanting and pointing:

PREGNANT WOMEN

(chanting)

The father of our babies; the  
father of our babies; the father of  
our babies.

Totally humiliated, Elizabeth runs from the stage. Leaving Bill Conroy standing on stage with the very pregnant Rhonda.

INT. SCHADENFREUDE CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The FLAT SCREENS come to life with a SATELLITE FEED. Leon quiets the employees.

LEON

Here we go.

ON THE TELEVISION:

NEWS ANCHOR

Arizona Senatorial candidate Melora Dandridge is expected to clarify her remarks from yesterday that illegal aliens were the cause of the wildfires that continue to rage through parts of Arizona after arson investigators said they have no proof whatsoever that was the case. We go to her live in a Walmart parking lot in Scottsdale.

Melora Dandridge's image fills the television screen. The crowd is chanting, "Make Mine Melora." She quiets them.

MELORA

Thank you, thank you. I am the Melora that is proud you want to make me mine. Or yours. Yes, yours.

We PUSH IN on TELEVISION until we DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WALMART PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Melora GIGGLES at her grammatical mistake. The Crowd loves it and begins CHANTING again.

MELORA

It is a great day for Scottsdale. A great day for Arizona. And a great day for America.

The Crowd Cheers. The Press Corps and Camera Operators jockey for position. Melora looks at each and every CAMERA, puts her hands on her hips and tilts her head.

MELORA (CONT'D)

Now some of those in the lame stream media are attacking my comments yesterday. They are twisting my words regarding the terrible wildfires right here in our beloved Grand Canyon State. It is fake news.

ANGLE ON: A NON-AFFILIATED NEWS PHOTOGRAPHER pushes forward through the crowd.

MELORA (CONT'D)

I said there was a very good chance that those fires were started by illegal aliens. Did illegal aliens actually start the fires? Probably. Do I know this for a fact? Well, I don't need the facts to know that my first act as your Senator will be to strengthen our borders by putting up a fence that will keep illegal aliens from coming over and starting fires in our great state.

The Crowd cheers. Melora soaks it in. Then:

NEWS PHOTOGRAPHER

(shouting)

What do you say to a source that claims you are the one that actually started the Chiricahua Mountain fire when you failed to properly extinguish your barbecue embers after an event.

INSERT: The News Producer and Senior Producer at the television station.

TELEVISION PRODUCER  
It's been asked. We'll run the  
video after she's done.

BACK ON: MELORA

Hands on hips, head tilted.

MELORA  
Now that's just crazy?

NEWS PHOTOGRAPHER  
You were in the Chiricahua Mountain  
area just prior to the report of  
the wildfire and we have footage of  
your staffers improperly disposing  
of the embers. How do you feel  
knowing you may have caused the  
fire that so far has destroyed  
upwards of 345 square miles? What  
do you want to say to the people  
that have lost their homes?

Melora is thrown. She does not have a snappy sound bite at  
the ready.

MELORA  
I would never do such a thing. But  
let me tell you what I will do --

INT. SCHADENFREUDE CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

On the FLAT SCREEN we see there is now a SPLIT SCREEN. On one  
side is Melora, Live, trying to get back on message. On the  
other side is VIDEO of her Staffers dumping burning coals out  
of a barbecue. This is the tidbit Fitz noticed while watching  
last night. It is one of the things he was editing on his  
computer in his home office.

MELORA  
(on television)  
-- I will use what I have learned  
as a successful businesswoman,  
lawyer and former Miss Arizona --

Leon and the Schadenfreude Staff burst into APPLAUSE. Leon  
turns to the group.

LEON  
Schadenfreude!!

A YOUNG PRETTY STAFFER works up her courage and then asks.

STAFFER

Leon? What does Schadenfreude mean, anyway?

LEON

It's German. It is pleasure derived from the misfortunes of others.

STAFFER

That makes sense. I guess.

INT. LOW RENT OFFICE SPACE - S.E. WASHINGTON

The Pollsters continue making calls. They all sort of blend together.

POLLSTER #5

Would you be more likely or less likely to continue to support Melora Dandridge if she was in any way responsible for starting the Chiricahua Mountain fire?

POLLSTER #6

-- or less likely to vote for Bill Conroy if DNA tests prove that he has fathered illegitimate children.

POLLSTER #7

-- responsible for the violent outburst outside the Governor's mansion this morning.

INT. FITZ'S SCHADENFREUDE OFFICE - A SHORT TIME LATER

Fitz is alone now. With his thoughts. We SLOWLY PUSH IN on the man that made all of these events happen. He is tired. Perhaps, he is at a crossroads.

Leon bursts in with Annette.

LEON

Sun Tsu himself could not have pulled that off any better. I am so glad we are on the same team.

FITZ

(soft)  
Yeah? Good, huh?

LEON

Better than good.

ANNETTE

How'd you know a reporter would ask her about the fire? Seemed like a long shot.

FITZ

He was a local stringer trying to make a name for himself. Plus, I gave him two grand.

ANNETTE

I love how flustered she looked.

LEON

She'll recover. We got to keep hitting at this one. She's like Medusa. Cut off one snake and two more grow back.

This actually makes Fitz laugh.

FITZ

No, that's the Hydra. Medusa turned you to stone if you looked directly at her.

LEON

She is still Medusa because when I look directly at her a certain part of me does turn to stone.

Leon realizes what he just said in front of Annette and is honestly embarrassed.

LEON (CONT'D)

I am so sorry, Annette.

ANNETTE

No worries. She is cute.

LEON

(to Fitz)

Where did you get the idea for the pregnant women?

FITZ

They did it to Warren G. Harding in 1884.

Jessica enters. With purpose.

JESSICA

Turn on Fox News.

Leon goes to manually turn on the FLAT SCREENS. Jessica slaps his hands away.

JESSICA (CONT'D)  
(stopping him)  
Leon! No! No! You always screw it up. Stop. Stop it.

Fitz turns on one of the televisions with a remote.

ON THE TELEVISION:

NEWS ANCHOR  
-- in addition to the rumors surrounding Senator Conroy's alleged infidelities with staff and the possibility of his fathering children out of wedlock comes the news that several former female staffers have released naked pictures of the senator they allege he sent them from his cell phone.

LEON  
Unbelievable!

NEWS ANCHOR  
The photos, said to number in the dozens, allegedly depict the Senator in only a towel and were sent between May and December of last year.

LEON  
Think they're real?

JESSICA  
They hired Gloria Allred this morning. They're real, all right.  
(to Fitz)  
How'd you know?

FITZ  
Hey, I was just shaking the trees.

LEON  
Amazing what falls out when you do that sometimes.

ANNETTE  
I feel bad for his wife. I saw her on 20/20 last year. Nice lady.

LEON

I wouldn't feel too bad. These women know what they are getting themselves into. You pay a price to be a Senator's wife.

(to Fitz)

You gonna tell us what you were talking about behind closed doors for so long? Hmm? Inquiring minds want to know.

FITZ

I'll tell you later. I gotta clear my head. I'll be back in a bit. We still have loads of work to do. These were just baby steps today. Didn't resolve anything. Remember the three keys: attack, attack, attack. Go negative or go home.

MUSIC: SLOW AND INTROSPECTIVE PLAYS THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - COLUMBUS, SOUTH CAROLINA

Governor Matthews sits on a sofa lost in thought and sipping a cocktail. He knows it is all over.

INT. MELORA DANDRIDGE'S TOUR BUS

Staffers are being dressed down by her CAMPAIGN MANAGER.

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

Now who was supposed to make sure the charcoal was completely out?

EXT. TOUR BUS - SIMULTANEOUS

Melora, looking great, is giving a live satellite interview to a solitary CAMERA. Hands on hips; head tilted.

MELORA

Why is the media out to get me?  
That's a great question, Anderson.  
They are afraid of me because I  
tell the truth. One of the things I  
learned while serving this great  
state as Miss Arizona is that  
people will say things about you.  
It doesn't mean --

INT. LOW RENT OFFICE SPACE - S.E. WASHINGTON - A BIT LATER

Most of our Pollsters are gone. The last FIVE are in line at the door ready to leave. Pierce hands each of them a fifty dollar bill as they exit.

PIERCE

Good job, everybody. See, I told you. Easy money and nobody got hurt. I will call you when we do this again.

INT. BILL CONROY'S HOME OFFICE

Bill Conroy is sitting on the sofa with a couple CAMPAIGN STAFFERS. They all look defeated.

BILL CONROY

I don't know why I did it. I was just messing around. It didn't mean anything. I can't believe they would be this disloyal. It was a joke.

His Staffers nod. What are they supposed to do, right?

BILL CONROY (CONT'D)

If you will excuse me I need to go try and patch things up with Elizabeth.

Bill goes to the door and, with his back to it so he is facing his staffers, OPENS IT.

BILL CONROY (CONT'D)

We'll get through this. We've had rough patches before.

As the door opens it REVEALS a body hanging from a noose of bedsheets tied to the second floor banister. We see this BEFORE Bill Conroy does. He turns:

BILL CONROY (CONT'D)

(frantic)

Oh my God. Call 911.

He runs up the circular flight of stairs and fumbles to untie the sheet.

BILL CONROY (CONT'D)

(desperate)

Dear God, no. Don't let her die. Don't be dead. Elizabeth I am so sorry. I love you. I'm sorry.

Sheet untied, the lifeless body crumples to the floor. Bill runs down the steps, jumps over the bottom end of the banister and scoops Elizabeth's body into his arms. Crying. Blubbering. Inconsolable.

BILL CONROY (CONT'D)  
 Nooooooooooooooooo. No. No. No. No.

He rocks back and forth with her in his arms. It is difficult to watch.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - VARIOUS - MUCH LATER

Fitz out walking the city. His city. We see him walking through Georgetown, descend the M Street Steps (The Exorcist Steps) and walk along the Potomac River. He's lost track of time. He is lost in thought.

Fitz pulls his Cell Phone out and sees that he has missed forty-seven calls. He DIALS.

WIDER: Far away from Fitz. From the other side of the Potomac. We know what he is being told. His body language lets us know at exactly what point he is told it.

INT. THE QUINLAN HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

JENNA, we know her from under the covers, 40s and quite pretty, is opening a bottle of wine. Three places are set at the dinner table. Food simmers on the stove.

Fitz unlocks and enters through the front door.

FITZ  
 Hey, Hon, just me.

Jenna heads over for a hug and a kiss. She looks deep into his eyes.

JENNA  
 Leon called.

Fitz is relieved he doesn't have to tell her. Doesn't want to talk about it.

JENNA (CONT'D)  
 It is all they are talking about on the news. That and the Arizona fires. They contained one of them. Wine?

FITZ  
 No thanks. I'm too tired. Where's Joey?

JENNA

In his room.

(a beat)

The school called. They can't handle him anymore. We are going to have to go to the Institute. I know it is expensive.

FITZ

We can afford it.

JENNA

No. I'm talking expensive-expensive. And it's a permanent expense. He'll always go there. That's a lot of money for a very long time.

This is difficult for them to talk about.

FITZ

I'm gonna go see him.

Fitz pulls away only to have Jenna playfully pull him back to her and into a hug. Grabbing his ass.

JENNA

Why don't you use your evil genius to elect someone that'll actually fix the health care system. Either that or use your evil genius to elect someone that will give us a shitload of money.

FITZ

(casual)

Yeah, well, maybe I'll do both.

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fitz appears in the doorway and looks around the room. Directly in front of him are two STACKS of BLOCKS aligned perfectly.

FITZ

(sotto)

Well, you've been busy.

CAM PULLS BACK to REVEAL at least a dozen STACK TOWERS made of different types of BLOCKS, CANS, LINCOLN LOGS etc.

FITZ (CONT'D)

Hey, Joe. It's dad. Home from work.

ANGLE ON: An 8-year-old BOY in the corner of the room stacking children's books into a tower. He does not get eye contact or acknowledge Fitz in any way.

Fitz gets down on his knees and crawls over to the Boy. Joe is the spit and image of the 8-year-old Fitz from Catholic School but there is no charisma or *joie de vivre*. It is a stark contrast from Young Fitz to Fitz' AUTISTIC SON.

Fitz grabs a box of soft blocks and begins his own tower. He is perfectly comfortable with the boy. Just wishes things were different.

FITZ (CONT'D)

Hey, Joe, I'm gonna make a tower, too. OK?

No response.

FITZ (CONT'D)

Think I can make one as good as you? I'm not sure, but I'm sure going to try.

Jenna appears in the doorway with a melancholy smile.

JENNA

Say, "Hi" to your dad, Joey.

JOEY

(without eye contact)  
Hi, dad.

JENNA

(to Fitz)  
You have to tell him to communicate. That's what the doctor said. Just tell him or he won't. It's real common.

INT. KITCHEN - SHORT TIME LATER

The three Quinlan's eat in silence. Fitz watches Joey stack his green beans into a square tower.

FITZ

Maybe he's just fucking with us and he isn't autistic at all. He's just an ahead of his time architect with an all encompassing vision.

Jenna smiles.

FITZ (CONT'D)

When the whole country is living in  
Quinlan designed green bean houses  
you will look back on this moment  
and realize I was onto something.

Fitz and Jenna both stare as Joey stacks his green beans.

INT. FITZ'S STUDY - LATER

Fitz sits at his desk staring at the BLANK TELEVISION  
SCREENS. Scared to turn them on. Reluctantly he does.

THE FLAT SCREEN comes to life. A NEWS ANCHOR is wrapping up  
the Elizabeth Conroy story. A still photograph of the Woman  
fills the screen, followed by the IMAGES of an AMBULANCE  
pulling away from the family home.

NEWS ANCHOR

(on television)

-- based on the events of the past  
48 hours, police say they are  
unable to rule out foul play one  
hundred percent and are awaiting  
the results of an autopsy before  
making an official statement.  
Elizabeth Conroy was forty-seven.

The News Anchor spins around in his chair to look at a  
different camera.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

And just when you thought the  
number of candidates wanting to be  
your next president couldn't get  
any higher. We add one.

ANGLE ON TELEVISION: B-ROLL FOOTAGE OF A PRESS CONFERENCE

Fitz sits up to take notice.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

He has no political experience. He  
has never held public office and he  
had never considered running for  
president until just a few weeks  
ago, but none of that prevented  
Thomas McTigue from announcing his  
intention to run in the upcoming  
Iowa Caucus.

Fitz walks all the way up to the Flat Screen so he is next  
to, THOMAS MCTIGUE, 55, All-American with a full head of  
brown hair with just a touch of gray around the temples.

He has "it." Every woman wants to sleep with him; every man wants to buy him a beer. Fitz has come face to face (through a television screen) with the American ideal. As much as Fitz does not want to admit that Walter was right, he has to say:

FITZ  
(sotto; smiling)  
Kennedyesque. I'll be goddamned.

CU: TELEVISION SCREEN

The guy is a natural. Better than Kennedy. Thomas McTigue is an honest to God, no bullshit, guys' guy that appears to be a commanding voice of reason. Neither pandering nor condescending. He is 100% sure of himself but there isn't any cockiness to him. He's got a little Paul Newman going on there. And that's good. They should bottle this shit.

Fitz smiles. There is a moment of hesitation.

Joey enters, dressed for bed. He stands in the doorway avoiding all eye contact with his dad.

Fitz stares at the boy. This seems to cinch his decision. He retrieves his CELL PHONE from his desk, takes a BUSINESS CARD from his wallet and dials.

While waiting for an answer he studies his son. Fitz smiles. Joey is expressionless.

FITZ (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
I'm in.  
(listens)  
Yeah, I'm sure. We'll talk  
tomorrow.

Fitz hangs up the phone. Watches his son.

FITZ (CONT'D)  
You want to play Dance Dance  
Revolution.

JOEY  
(flat)  
Yes.

Fitz pulls the TWO DDR MATS out and switches the TV to PLAYSTATION mode.

The SCREEN comes to life with SOUND and VIBRANT COLOR. Joey is mesmerized by the screen.

Joey expertly taps the CONTROL PAD on the MAT with his FOOT. Clearly, Joey and Fitz do this often. Joey picks a song and hits SELECT with his foot.

DDR VOICE  
(on television)  
Ready. Go.

The SONG BLASTS from the SPEAKERS as the COLORFUL ARROWS ascend up the SCREEN and Joey and Fitz move their feet in perfect unison to the instruction.

WIDER: Father and son moving to the music together, each on their own mat. CROWD NOISE and CHEERS come from the TV. They are crushing it.

ANGLE ON: Jenna in the doorway watching her two flawed men play together.

Joey's face is passionless concentration.

Fitz's face is brimming with emotion. His eyes are tearing up. Partly from the events of the day; partly for his son; partly because he has some hope left.

Fitz turns to see that Jenna is watching. Without missing a dance step, he tells his wife how he is feeling.

FITZ  
You know something, Jenna.  
(a sincere revelation)  
I really do love this country.

JENNA  
(reassuring)  
I know you do, Honey.  
(a beat; then)  
You just have an odd way of showing  
it.

Fitz goes back to dancing next to his son. They are in LOCK STEP and racking up quite the score.

The DDR MUSIC is slowly REPLACED with the voices of children singing "FIFTY NIFTY UNITED STATES" just like in the open.

WIDER: Fitz and Son keep dancing. As we

FADE OUT.