

DARK HORSE

Screenplay by
Doug Richardson

Based on the novel

February 1998

FADE IN:

EXT. FLOWER HILL - NIGHT

SUPER: PRIMARY TUESDAY. A sea breeze rustles through the trees of this upscale community. CAMERA TRACKS up the drive of a large restored Victorian house. This is the Dutton home.

INT. DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

A nanny, ROSA, leads three-year-old ABBY up the stairs.

ABBY

But I wanna see daddy on the TV.

ROSA

You see daddy when he get home.

INT. FIFTH FLOOR CORRIDOR - HILTON HOTEL - NIGHT

The CAMERA chases a young, Murray LEVY as he hustles down to room number 523. He checks his watch then bangs on the door.

INT. ROOM 523 - INTRO MITCH DUTTON

Darkness, save for the TV broadcasting election returns. The CAMERA SWIVELS toward the bed, revealing the suited candidate, MITCH DUTTON, roguishly handsome, forty, and the projected winner of the Democratic Primary.

TV ANCHOR

It's official. Channel 9 now predicts that attorney and community activist, Mitchell Alan Dutton, will be the Democratic nominee for Texas' thirty-first Congressional District.

LEVY (O.S.)

(banging again)

Mitch? It's Murray! You okay?

Mitch just turns UP THE VOLUME. Remote control in hand, he surfs the local channels. A live remote from the George W. Hammond election HQ appears.

REMOTE REPORTER

We're here at the primary victory bash for thirty year incumbent congressman, George "Hurricane" Hammond, who, we're predicting,

has pulled off another landslide primary victory.

TV ANCHOR

Were there any Republican challengers this year?

REMOTE REPORTER

Jane? I'm sorry, I can't hear you over the crowd. But I think Hurricane's about to address his supporters.

The TV CAMERA pans and shifts focus to the podium, where the aged and overweight incumbent with a gin blossom face, appears in a suit and ten gallon hat. With Hurricane's hand in the air, the rehearsed crowd calms.

HURRICANE (ON TV)

You know, twenty-eight years ago, I first stood on this stage. A primary night winner and disadvantaged dark horse. And I said to you, don't lose the faith. It's never too late for a comeback!

(cheers; hands up)

Not only did I come back and beat that old son-of-a-buck, "Slim" Jim Ferguson. But y'all know what? Ol' Hurricane's been comin' back for more ever since!

The crowd goes wild. Levy is POUNDING again at the door.

LEVY (O.S.)

Mitch? Fitz says if you don't come now we're gonna lose our coverage to Houston.

MITCH

Where's my wife?

LEVY

Connie's downstairs with Gina. I think they went to find a shot of Cuervo.

On TV, the thirty year incumbent is going through his perfunctory motions.

HURRICANE (ON TV)

I want to thank my loyal campaign staff, led by the one and only Marshall Lambeer.

On the podium, MARSHALL LAMBEER appears with a nod he's done a million times before.

HURRICANE (ON TV)

And a kind word to the Democratic nominee.
Whoever that may be... Hold onto your hat
son -

MITCH AND HURRICANE

Cuz the Hurricane is a comin'.

As Mitch stands to put on his jacket, checking his look and note cards in the mirror, HOLD ON THE TV, where as Hurricane is waving a hearty goodbye to his followers, the remote feed switches to:

TV ANCHOR

Now, we go live to the Mitch Dutton
Campaign headquarters at the Cathedral City
Hilton, where we're told the predicted
winner of the Democratic primary and would-
be-challenger will be addressing a youthful
crowd of well-wishers...

EXT. CATHEDRAL CITY AIRPORT - NIGHT

A chauffeur-driven Cadillac stops next to a private, Gulfstream V aircraft with engines warming. Out of the car steps Hurricane, drink in hand, followed by Marshall Lambeer.

HURRICANE

Don't look so pissed off.

MARSHALL

Wouldn't have hurt if you'd hung around and
shook a few more hands.

HURRICANE

Spent my whole life in Texas, Marshall. I
don't need to spend two more hours in the
place when the only hand I need to shake is
waiting for me on that beautiful airplane.
Do me a favor and fax me the final tally.

Hurricane stumbles up the steps onto the aircraft and the outstretched hand of six-foot-six-inch VIDOR KINGMAN.

VIDOR

George? It's good to see ya!

HURRICANE
Ain't that the truth.

The two men have a good laugh at that one. The door to the aircraft is pulled shut, and the jet taxis out, leaving Marshall to wave and watch in the Gulfstream's jetwash.

INT. HILTON KITCHEN - NIGHT

Levy, a youthful twenty-five, carries a walkie-talkie and shows Mitch the back way toward the ballroom. The distant chant of, "MITCH, MITCH, MITCH, MITCH," shakes the pots and pans. At the turn, Mitch is greeted by his beautiful, but nervous wife, CONNIE, and her best friend GINA SWEET. Gina gives Connie a kiss on the cheek.

GINA
Good luck, sweetie. I'll be watching you.

Mitch and Gina exchange a brief, distasteful glance at each other. Then the candidate turns to give Connie a confident smile and takes her hand. But at the threshold of the ballroom, the crushing sound hits Connie and she stalls. Mitch turns to his wife.

CONNIE
I just need a minute.

MITCH
Then you got a minute.

LEVY
Mitch! Fitz says we gotta go now or we lose the coverage.

MITCH
Fitz can wait.

Mitch has Connie by the hand. He pulls her through the kitchen, finding privacy from the chaos in the KITCHEN PANTRY.

CONNIE
I can't breathe.

MITCH
It's okay. It's just a short ride. In November it'll all be over.

CONNIE
I thought you said you wouldn't make it this far.

MITCH

Nobody's more surprised than me... Now,
who's the prettiest girl in the room?

Connie takes a look around. There's nobody in the kitchen pantry but
the two of them. She finds a smile.

CONNIE

Mitch, please...

MITCH

Just watch my lips.

Mitch gives her a confident kiss.

INT. HILTON BALLROOM - NIGHT

A band plays, the room rocks, and four hundred strong are chanting,
"MITCH, MITCH, MITCH." FITZ KOLATCH is there to offer a hand helping
Connie up onto the dais and a word to Mitch.

FITZ

Keep it short. Free TV is free TV - that
and we don't want them cutting away to some
other primary schmuck.

TV lights blaze. Mitch takes the stage, arms held high. Connie at his
side wearing a painted smile. Fitz gives Connie a whisper.

FITZ

Two steps back, one step to the side.

Connie bristles at the advice, but obeys. The TV cameras move from the
two shot of Mitch and Connie to a close-up of the candidate.

MITCH

Thank you. Thank you so very much.

But the crowd won't quiet. They're young. And the good looking
candidate is their ticket to a better future. Mitch is overwhelmed,
taking a step back.

FITZ

Goddammit. Don't lose the TV!

But Mitch ignores Fitz, turning his head around just enough so Connie
can see his lips. He mouths:

MITCH

You are the prettiest girl in the room.

Suddenly, Connie beams.

EXT. HAMMOND'S VIRGINIA FARM - LATE AFTERNOON

The lurching incumbent spills what's left of his vodka, standing up, stumbling off the patio and toward the stables. A Jamaican housekeeper cleans up after him.

HOUSEKEEPER

You're too drunk to go hunt.

HURRICANE

Shut up, woman. Are you my wife? I don't think so!

HOUSEKEEPER

Thank God for that.

(crosses herself)

God rest her soul.

HURRICANE

C'mon, girls.

Hurricane slaps his thigh. Two fox hounds appear at his side, following him to the stable.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DUSK

Four live rabbits are tossed into a burlap sack. The sack is tied shut with one end of a twenty foot rope. The other end is tied to a saddle. The RIDER appears, shadowed and unrecognizable. He takes a baseball bat to the burlap sack, violently crushing the rabbits inside. He tosses the bat and mounts the horse.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - HURRICANE - DUSK

The dogs are lost, HOWLING way ahead of the old man.

HURRICANE

Dumbass dogs.

(shouts)

THAT'S FAR ENOUGH!

Hurricane spurs his mare, a beautiful, Virginia Roan. Ducking branches, the old horseman gives chase.

THE RIDER

Charging along, dragging those dead rabbits behind.

THE HOUNDS

Yowling, on the scent.

HURRICANE

Drunk, bloated, the horse is in control.

THE CHASE

The rider doubles back around. The hounds shift directions. Hurricane reins his horse to a stall. The CAMERA CIRCLES wildly. A drunken smile creases the old man's face. He thinks the hounds are onto a fox.

HURRICANE

Okay, girls. Stay on the scent.

DARKNESS DESCENDS

The rider switches again, a serpentine trail, in and out of the trees. The dogs swivel down the trail. And further back, a branch rakes Hurricane's face. He nearly falls, throwing himself forward, dropping the reins, hanging onto the horse's neck. Lunch in his throat, he can't scream. The dangling reins catch under the mare's front hooves and both animal and incumbent go crashing to the earth. Silence.

THE RIDER

Cuts loose the burlap sack, then turns his horse around, easing back through the arching limbs and dead leaves.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - HURRICANE - NIGHT

Legs broken, ribs busted, the congressional battle axe has propped himself against a tree. He coughs and spits blood. Thank God for the booze, or it'd hurt a helluva lot worse. He hears the hounds, closing on him. Then his eyes pop open when the blast of flashlight appears in his face. He squints. The rider stands shadowed above him.

HURRICANE

... help me.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - HURRICANE - DAY

Flies buzz around the dead incumbent. With eyes opened and fixed as if

the flashlight beam was still in his face, Hurricane remains propped against the tree. The mare lies only feet away from him, her poor neck busted. A CORONER'S TEAM works around the site. Local Sheriff's DEPUTIES maintain the perimeter. And standing dead center is Marshall Lambeer, sadly holding a cell phone to his ear.

MARSHALL LAMBEER

No. The dogs came home without him...
They're saying he fell first, then came the
heart attack... No. I want to keep it off
the wire until I talk to his kids... Me?
I'm okay. The old bull was always in a
battle with the hard stuff. Looks like it
finally got the better of him.

Marshall flips off the cell phone and turns to get one last gander.

MARSHALL LAMBEER

You dumb old fucker.

EXT. FLOWER HILL DRIVE - DAY

On the elevated part of the island. Stately old houses, set back from a winding blacktop. Blooming Dogwoods. Magnolias. Mitch with his two Golden Retrievers keeping pace.

INT. KITCHEN - FLOWER HILL HOME - DAY

Connie and Abby are sharing a waffle off the same plate. Mitch ENTERS, the dogs in front of him. Abby offers up some of her breakfast at the end of her fork.

MITCH

Mmm. Save some waffle for me.

ABBY

You can have my waffle, daddy.

CONNIE

Daddy can have his own waffle.

MITCH

Mommy's correct, sweetie. Waffles are a
key part of The Daddy's Bill of Rights.
(the phone rings; answers with a
daddy's wink)
Abby's Waffle-Haus.

WE INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FITZ'S BMW - IN MOTION - DAY

One hand on the wheel, the other on his cell phone, Fitz can hardly contain his glee.

FITZ

He's dead.

MITCH

Who's dead?

FITZ

He fell off his horsy, or at least that's what I heard.

MITCH

Can you be any more vague?

FITZ

I got a call. Solid source. Wanted to be the first to congratulate me for handling Texas' newest congressman.

EXT. THE STRAND - CATHEDRAL ISLAND - DAY

Scattered crowds line the historic strip as a dour funeral procession marches toward the white, sandstone cathedral after which the island was named. A horse-drawn trolley carries the flag-draped coffin. Mourners walk behind it. Family. Friends. And WARREN REDDEN, the Chief of Police, pulling his horse behind him.

EXT. ST. ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL - DAY

Post funeral, the mourners EXIT. But as Mitch and Connie appear on the steps, the candidate is singled out by TV cameras and REPORTERS.

REPORTER #1

Mr. Dutton. How do you feel today?

MITCH

I feel sorry for the Hammond family and I feel sorry for Cathedral. We lost someone dear to us all.

REPORTER #2

But you and Hammond were on opposite sides

-

MITCH

Let me make this clear. Though I disagreed with him, I did not disrespect him. Now, please. This is his day.

REPORTER #3

But now that you're the front runner, won't you be hard to beat in November?

MITCH

Front runner? I don't think so. The Republican State Central Committee'll surely nominate a substantial candidate --

REPORTER #2

Care to venture a guess who the new opposition will be?

MITCH

No. Now please. This is a day of grieving. Not for politics.

HOLLICE

So tell us, Mitch. Tell us about your grieving. Did you really cry when you heard the good news?

Mitch whirls to find HOLLICE WATERS. The same age as Mitch, golf shirt, pork pie hat, shit-ass grin. The looks between them show they go way back.

MITCH

Shame on you, Hollice. You should know better.

HOLLICE

I wouldn't be doin' my job if I didn't ask.

Mitch shakes a shaming head and is gone, pulling Connie behind him. A female TV NEWSIE shoves Hollice.

NEWSIE

You are such an asshole. He was good for at least another five minutes of tape.

HOLLICE

Yeah, and what are you good for? Blow jobs at five?

INT. MITCH'S VOLVO - IN MOTION - DAY

After a long silence, it's all finally hit Connie.

CONNIE

Front runner? I thought the big idea was that you weren't supposed to win.

MITCH

Sweetheart, I never said I wasn't going to try.

CONNIE

I remember the conversation, Mitch. This was about you "getting noticed." Saying all the right things so you could get a bench appointment.

MITCH

You want me to lose? Is that it?

CONNIE

We'd decided to raise Abby on the island - in island schools - in my mother's house.

For that, Mitch doesn't have an answer.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - NIGHT

SUPER: DETROIT MICHIGAN over this establishing shot.

INT. POLLSTAR, INC. - NIGHT

A windowless phone bank operation with various aged SOLICITORS dialing from computer lists. Callers answers are keyed into computers hooked to a larger, number-crunching mainframe. Intro MARTY CHANG. He keys up the Dutton account. On his computer screen, the newest polling numbers appear in a bar graph of green-colored positives far outweighing the red-colored negatives.

INT. DUTTON HQ - DAWN

Though the war room is empty, a computer automatically switches on and the color printer spits out the POLLSTAR DAILY TRACKING.

INT. FITZ'S OFFICE - DUTTON HQ - DAY

The same color print-out is handed to Fitz. He grins.

INT. BACK ENTRANCE - CATHEDRAL CITY JAIL - DAY

A black guard unlocks the steel door and surreptitiously lets Mitch ENTER, then the CAMERA FOLLOWS as he escorts Mitch down the tight corridor. All the while, Mitch empties his pockets: Cell-phone, pager, pen, keys, etc.

INT. HOLDING CELL - COUNTY JAIL - DAY

Another black man, CALVIN SMITH, is cuffed and chained to a desk. He wears on orange, county prisoner's jumpsuit.

CALVIN

Aw, man. I'm so happy you come.

MITCH

I'm not your lawyer anymore.

CALVIN

But you come. 'N that means you still care.

MITCH

So you got into a fight. You wanna say why?

CALVIN

You know why. I was out on the rig, doin' my own dance just fine. But when the supply boat come back without my meds...

(shakes his head)

I ask my foreman if they can make the boat go back. I show him my copy of the prescription and everything, but he say the boat not comin' back 'till Friday.

MITCH

When you run out of meds?

CALVIN

Thursday. I mean, then by Friday mornin', I can feel it comin on. Then this white guy. Name's Keyhoe. But everybody call him Ass-hoe, cuzza how he acts.

MITCH

So you hit him and violated your parole.

CALVIN

Had it comin'....
(then drops his head)
But I didn't get my meds.

MITCH

Where's your lawyer?

CALVIN

Transferred out to work on the other side.
You know. DA's office and shit.

MITCH

I feel sorry for you Calvin. Really. But
I can't do much of anything.

CALVIN

Yes you can. You can talk to my parole
O.C. You can tell him I need my meds and
my job. Hey, I betcha he gonna vote for
you.

Mitch looks at Calvin. Hates to have his arm twisted. But they do
have a history.

MITCH

How's your boys?

CALVIN

Oh, man. They growin' like weeds. Tai's
playin' baseball this summer. And I'm
gonna coach him whenever I'm off the rig.
Hey, how's about your kid? He playin' ball
yet?

MITCH

I got a little girl. And so far Barbie
doesn't come with baseball accessories.

EXT. DUTTON HQ - DAY

Establishing. An old, salt-encrusted structure under The Span which
crosses to the mainland. A banner hangs outside: DUTTON FOR CONGRESS.

INT. DUTTON HQ - DAY

The door opens and Mitch ENTERS, instantly greeted by Levy and a stack
of pink, message slips.

LEVY

Top of the list, Denise Cambell. She's the notary from the TDL. She's needs your signature for their first, post primary mailer. Then there's one from a Judge Aaron Hempstead and two more from some guy on the state parole board. And there's your wife -

MITCH

(holds up a slip)

Who's this? Shakespeare McCann? And why does he want to have lunch with me?

Fitz appears from his office. He blocks the corridor.

FITZ

Where the hell have you been? You know I've had everybody and their brother's cousin callin' for you.

MITCH

Personal business Fitz. I still have a life of my own.

FITZ

Fuck you. Front runners have no life. They are public property. Now, I got someone I want you to meet.

MITCH

(with that slip)

You know a Shakespeare McCann?

FITZ

All in good time.

INT. FITZ' OFFICE - DUTTON HQ - DAY

Mitch is wheeled into the room by Fitz, then does a charming double-take when he lays his eyes on RENE CRAVEN. She's on the couch with a sly smile and long legs stretching out from underneath an Armani suit.

FITZ

Rene Craven. Meet the candidate. Mitch Dutton.

MITCH

(politely shaking hands)

You're the Media -

RENE

- Consultant. The pleasure's mine, Mr. Dutton.

Rene's voice is Mississippi silk. Her eyes are the kind that flash an instant attraction.

MITCH

Mitch... I like to be called Mitch. But I'm sure Fitz already told you that.

RENE

He did. But I like formal introductions.

MITCH

I hear you worked for Mike Neumeyer out in Los Angeles.

RENE

I did. I liked the candidate and I like special elections. But I can't say I liked L.A. You and Mike were at Stanford?

MITCH

He was number one in our class.

RENE

And who was number two?

MITCH

You're lookin' at him.

FITZ

Not today. You're number one with a bullet and there you will stay until November 3rd.

MITCH

Do me a favor and quit with the front runner stuff.

(winks at Rene)

It might go to my head.

FITZ

You won't care after you hear the official word on your new opposition.

MITCH
Just gimme the name.

FITZ
It's the one in your pocket. Shakespeare
McCann.

Mitch suddenly fishes into his pocket, coming up with that pink message slip. He holds it in the air.

FITZ
Before you ask just who the hell
Shakespeare McCann is - which is exactly
what I did - Murray has the details.

LEVY
Texas has some antiquated election rules.
And when it comes to Republicans, it says
that in the event of a nominee's death, the
state central committee will be required to
name a new nominee within ten days.

MITCH
That's what I thought.

LEVY
Unless - a challenger comes up with at
least fifteen percent of the primary vote.

FITZ
I give you... Shakespeare McCann.

MITCH
(to Rene)
You following this?

RENE
Sure. I'm amused.

MITCH
You're saying this guy - Shakespeare
Whoever - scored fifteen points off
Hurricane Hammond and nobody's even heard
of him?

FITZ
Murray?

LEVY

Well, if you do the numbers. Hammond was a thirty-year-incumbent, running practically zero opposition. That means a low voter turnout of under thirty percent. Fifteen percent of which is just under five thousand votes.

MITCH

Five thousand how?

LEVY

The hard way. Inside word I got was this guy McCann bought a list. The hard core voters. Baptists. Right wing of the AARP.

INSERT SHOT - BOILER ROOM OPERATION

A six-man operation. A Xerox of McCann's list is distributed to people in cubicles dialing phones.

LEVY (V.O.)

McCann cold-called the list, selling these bargain basement portrait plans.

INSERT SHOT - PHOTO STUDIO

Flash. A picture is taken by a portrait photographer of an eighteen-month-old TODDLER.

LEVY (V.O.)

Afterward, the pictures were hand-delivered by the candidate himself.

INSERT SHOT - SOUTH COUNTY SUBURBIA

A happy GRANDMOTHER receives the pictures of her grandbaby, along with some red, white, and blue colored literature with SHAKESPEARE MCCANN emblazoned across the top. And it's all served up with a handshake.

CLOSE ONLY ON - THE CANDIDATE'S GRIN

Broad and gleaming white.

BACK TO SCENE

RENE

The picture thing. Good idea. Kissin' babies and shakin' down grandma. Who said

ol' time politics was dead?

MITCH

But five thousand votes. Not exactly a mandate, is it?

FITZ

I promise you, the guys up in Dallas must be pulling their hair out. They'll be looking for a loophole. But I made some calls and got it on good authority that they're stuck with him.

LEVY

Shakespeare McCann. Zero name ID. Nobody's even knows what he looks like.

MITCH

Well, looks like I'll find out soon enough.
(that slip again)
Message says he wants to have lunch.

FITZ

Oh, no you don't. He's got everything to gain.

MITCH

Oh, please. He's being a gentleman and it's just lunch. You think Hurricane woulda called me for lunch? I don't think so.

FITZ

For lunch? Hurricane woulda eaten you alive. But give this unknown a chance to size you up? Maybe get a picture of himself swapping barbecue with my candidate? No fuckin' way. You're news. He's not. And I'd like to keep it that way until November, thank-you-very-much.

But Mitch is clearly his own man. He reveals a teasing smile at Fitz, then turns to Rene. Her eyes meet his with a challenge.

MITCH

So what does the big time media consultant think?

RENE

She respectfully thinks the candidate is
and always will be... boss.

EXT. DRIVING SHOTS - CATHEDRAL - DAY

Mitch's gray Volvo cuts across The Span that connects the island to the mainland.

EXT. GARNETT, TX - DAY

A dusty pass-through for trucks and tourists. Mitch parks his car in front of a dive called The Mairzy Doats Cafe, covers his eyes from the wash of dust from a passing eighteen wheeler, then ENTERS.

INT. MAIRZY DOATS CAFE - DAY

Small. Heavy on the varnish. Checkered, plastic table cloths. And empty, save for the buxom, forty-year-old waitress who serves Mitch an iced tea.

BUXOM

Now, who you say you was waiting for?

SLOW MOTION POV - MITCH

From the corner booth where Mitch is seated, he watches him enter - SHAKESPEARE MCCANN. Lean, suit jacket and dress slacks, no tie. He scans the room, catching a look at Mitch, just before the cafe's OWNER appears from the kitchen. Shakespeare turns to the owner, throws an arm around the man's shoulder, revealing a megawatt smile. The two share a private joke, before Shakespeare heads over in Mitch's direction with an outstretched hand. That smile again.

SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare McCann.

MITCH

Mitch Dutton.

SHAKESPEARE

(sits)

Betcha I'm late. Curse of the fellah who
likes to hear himself talk.

MITCH

That's okay. Gave me a chance to look over
the menu.

SHAKESPEARE

Forget the menu. Special of the house is catfish. Emphasis on special.

(turns toward the kitchen)

Two of Jerry's number ones, will ya?

(back to Mitch)

Whatcha drinkin'?

MITCH

Iced tea, thanks.

SHAKESPEARE

Iced tea and a Dr. Pepper, no ice. Just the can.

(back to Mitch)

Hope this is out of the way enough for you. Didn't want you thinkin' I wanted to make this some kinda public "shake hands and come out fighting." Like professional fighters do, you know? TV cameras and all that posing.

MITCH

Not at all. My campaign manager, well, that's something else.

SHAKESPEARE

Campaign manager. There's an idea. Guess I better get me one now that I'm in the race.

The drinks arrive, delivered by a WAITRESS young enough to be Jerry's daughter.

SHAKESPEARE

Thanks, sweetie.

(guzzles from the can)

Hell. Yesterday I was the Republican protest vote. Who'd a thought I was gonna be in the big race?

(toasts with the can)

God rest ol' Hurricane's soul.

MITCH

He was a great man.

SHAKESPEARE

Great, my ass. And we both know it. He

hadn't so much as stuck more than his big toe into South County in ten years. That's why I threw my hat in the ring. You too, I bet.

MITCH

I was only saying that even though I may have disagreed with him from time to time -

SHAKESPEARE

I get it. You respected him. Like he was some kinda Great Uncle. Hell, if they'd stuck a TV camera in my face, I'da said the same damn thing.

MITCH

I meant ever word I said.

SHAKESPEARE

I'm sure you did. But he's dead and we're not. So here's one to us. You and me.

(raises the Dr. Pepper)

May the best man win.

TIME CUT - LATER

The young waitress delivers another round of drinks along with two slices of apple pie. And while Shakespeare's lunch plate is just fish bones, Mitch's is still piled high with greasy fried fish and French fries.

WAITRESS

On Jerry.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, thank Jerry for me, will ya?

(back to Mitch)

Where was I?

MITCH

You had no money. No staff. No management...

SHAKESPEARE

If it weren't for my driver's license, I swear I'd forget my own name. Anyway, I met this guy up in Dallas who said he could sell me a list of the most consistent Republican voters in South County. That's

where I get the idea.

(points a fork at Mitch's plate)

You gonna eat that?

Before Mitch can answer, Shakespeare's reaching across and digging into Mitch's plate.

SHAKESPEARE

Now, where was I again?

MITCH

The portrait scheme.

SHAKESPEARE

Scheme?

MITCH

Forgive me. Campaign tactic.

SHAKESPEARE

Nope. Shakes heard it. You called it a scheme.

MITCH

Let's call it inventive. After all, you took fifteen points off of Hurricane Hammond. That deserves something.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, it wasn't no big deal. I'm in the print shop business. Pickin' up the photo business as a sideline was easy. Put in some phone lines. Hire some old ladies to dial the digits.

MITCH

And it got your foot in the door.

SHAKESPEARE

Exactly. But once I got it in there, I had to have a message.

(another bite of Mitch's fish)

MITCH

And what message was that?

SHAKESPEARE

Now, you wouldn't be tryin' to get me to give up my campaign platform? Only fair, I

guess. Since I know yours. Read all your campaign mail. Good. Real good. You're more centrist than Democrat. 'Least that's how I see it. Left wingers don't get elected in Texas. Gotta cut a piece out of the middle of the road for a Democrat to make it to The White House.

MITCH

I'll stick to Congress, thankyouverymuch.

SHAKESPEARE

How about the pie? You having any of that pie?

Once again, before Mitch can answer, Shakespeare's digging in.

MITCH

Didn't feed you much at your house.

SHAKESPEARE

You sayin' somethin' about my momma?

MITCH

... No. I'm sorry. You're just... very hungry, I guess.

SHAKESPEARE

Just don't like seein' anything go to waste. I mean, that's part of my platform. Government Goddamn waste. Wastin' money, wastin' food, wastin' resources, and wastin' the electorate's time.

MITCH

Sounds good. I can agree with that.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, don't get too agreeable on me. Save somethin' for the great debate. Otherwise we might just bore the shit out of the voters.

MITCH

So? Why not bore them? Sure, the real issues are dull. But if we stick to them, make it a real public debate, we might pull off something the likes South County hasn't seen for a long time.

SHAKESPEARE

And what might that be?

MITCH

An actual, grassroots policy mandate.

For the first time, Shakespeare stops eating. Jaw set, he just stares at Mitch.

MITCH

I'm sorry. Was I unclear?

SHAKESPEARE

Oh, you were clear. You think I don't understand English? I bet you think I'm stupid?

MITCH

Not at all.

SHAKESPEARE

Then you think I'm smart?

MITCH

Look. We just met.

SHAKESPEARE

No. Really. I wanna know. Fella like you. Lawyer. Must be good at sizin' a man up pretty quick. I bet you already made up your damn mind about Shakes McCann.

MITCH

You obviously don't know me very well.

SHAKESPEARE

There it is. That patronizing tone. You can size a man but I can't?

Mitch is clearly uncomfortable. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a twenty.

MITCH

I'm sorry. We're off on the wrong foot. Here. How about I pay for lunch.

SHAKESPEARE

How about you cut the insults and leave your money in your pocket...

(softens)
 Hell. I invited you to lunch. That and
 it's on ol' Jerry. remember?

But Mitch isn't paying attention. He's looking at the streaked
 restaurant window. Cupping his eyes against the glare is Hollice
 Waters.

SHAKESPEARE
 You know him?

MITCH
 Reporter. Writes for The Mirror.

SHAKESPEARE
 Don't that just break it. And I'll bet you
 think I called him.

MITCH
 The thought crossed my mind.

SHAKESPEARE
 Hell no.
 (stands, dropping a tip on the
 table)
 I said nobody but you and me and I'm a man
 of my word. C'mon, I'll show you the way
 out back.

MITCH
 That's okay.

SHAKESPEARE
 Let's go. What the man don't see he can't
 exactly write about.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND CAFE - DAY

Shakespeare ushers Mitch through the door.

SHAKESPEARE
 Thataway.

MITCH
 (turns)
 Listen, I feel really silly -

SLAM!

Shakespeare's fist catches Mitch over the right eye. Mitch careens backward, against a wall. And McCann's on top of him, with more fists, an elbow, a knee to the groin. Mitch crumbles, wheezing for air.

SHAKESPEARE

That's for my momma, you condescending sonofabitch.

(kneels next to Mitch)

She did what she could to put food on the table. Now, look at me... I said look at me!

(lifts Mitch's chin)

I know you, mister. I sized you up the second I saw your smug, lawyer face on TV. Now, I want you to go back to your cozy little island office and look in your Websters at the meanin' of "campaign." Then maybe you'll get yourself a clue about Shakespeare McCann.

Shakespeare stands and EXITS, leaving Mitch still sucking for air.

INT. GAS STATION PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Next door to the Mairzy Doats cafe, Mitch dials 911.

911 OPERATOR

911 operator.

MITCH

I would like to report...

But Mitch sees Hollice walking back across the street from the five and dime store.

911 OPERATOR

Sir, may I help you?

Mitch leaves the phone hanging and cuts a direct path to his car. Only when he's stepping in does he hear:

HOLLICE

HEY, MITCH!

Keys in the ignition, Mitch has the car in reverse, then forward, peeling out of the dirt lot and leaving Hollice to chew the dust.

INT. OUTPATIENT CLINIC - DAY

A small, Cathedral Island outpatient clinic. In a corner, Levy confers with the HISPANIC DOCTOR.

LEVY

So you're cool with this? Nobody knows we were here.

HISPANIC DOCTOR

Please. It's because of Mr. Mitch that our doors stay open.

The CAMERA FOLLOWS A NURSE into:

CLINIC - BACK ROOM

Mitch is propped up on an emergency bed. His face is red and severely puffed. His lip split to his nose. His right eye nearly closed shut. The nurse attends while:

FITZ

Go ahead. File a complaint. I'll tell you what happens next. The prick gets his picture, front page, right next to yours.

MITCH

I'll tell you what else he gets. Arrested for assault.

FITZ

Great. More free press. That and you end up looking like you took a licking. We're in Texas, Mitch. You oughta know that.

(punches at the air)

I should never have let you go.

MITCH

It was my decision... I don't know. Maybe I did insult him.

(the nurse with a stitch)

Ow! Can you wait a minute?

NURSE

I must stitch your lip while the Novocain is working.

MITCH

Well, it's not working. So give me a

moment. Please.

The nurse EXITS.

FITZ

I thought you said it wasn't provoked.

MITCH

I don't know. It was bizarre. I'd agree with him, he'd say I was patronizing. Pay the man a compliment, he took it like some kind of slap in the face.

FITZ

Know what he is? He's a nut.

MITCH

A dangerous nut.

FITZ

Okay. So file a complaint. But it wasn't out in Garnett. Another alley. Behind the campaign office. You were parked out back. The assailant came out of nowhere. You never got a look at him.

MITCH

Swell. You want to use this to keep me in the press.

FITZ

That's my job. We can tie it up with an anti-crime statement.

MITCH

Filing a false complaint is a crime.

FITZ

So's letting this hooligan into the race. Now, have you talked to Connie?

MITCH

I'll call her when I'm done here.

FITZ

I'd think twice about that, too.

MITCH

She's my wife!

FITZ

And she's Gina Sweet's best gal pal. And we both know Gina's loose with more than her lips.

MITCH

I can't tell my wife?

FITZ

Hey. You're the candidate. It's your decision.

INT. DELICIOUS DELIVERIES CATERING - DAY

A large, industrial kitchen with various HISPANIC workers bustling about. At a desk in the corner of a large is not-exactly-dressed-for-cooking Gina Sweet. She's on the phone with Connie.

GINA

C'mon, sweetheart. It's lonely down here without you.

(then hushed)

And you know my Spanish is for shit.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KITCHEN - DUTTON HOME - CONNIE - DAY

CONNIE

I'm being the good wife today. Abby's at her play group and I'm cooking soup for Mitch.

GINA

You're not hearing me. I can't make profiteroles for fifty. I'm strictly front office. Can't he take care of himself?

CONNIE

He was mugged, G. That and we barely see each other. This is my chance to be with him, if you know what I mean. Now, Marta knows what she's doing. Just make sure the driver's on time and the tent's got air conditioning.

GINA

Men are absolute babies.
(the phone rings)

Hang on.

(switches lines)

Delicious Deliveries... No. Just stop right there. We do French. We do California Nouvelle. Sometimes, we'll even do Northern Italian. But honey, we don't and we won't ever do barbecue. Now have a nice day.

(switches lines again)

I'm back. Now, how's this? What if I was to get sick. Then you'd have to come help.

As Connie laughs softly, clearly amused, THE CAMERA trolls by her, through the dining room, swiveling by the living room and heading for the door of Mitch's home office.

INT. MITCH'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

A library of books and homework. Mitch sits in his big, leather chair, his face puffy and stitched. He's staring at the TV. He's on another phone line with Fitz.

MITCH

Yeah. I'm watching it now.

ON THE TV

A live feed from a meat packing plant. It's the same young Newsie who bitched at Hollice Waters. Behind her is a stream of handcuffed illegal immigrants boarding an INS-acquired school bus. She's interviewing Shakespeare McCann.

SHAKESPEARE (ON TV)

Lemme put it to you this way. In China, they've got The Great Wall. And it's great because for centuries it kept the unwanted and unwashed out of China. I'll bet with all the money that the federal government spends on a failed immigration policy, we could build us a Great Wall of our very own...

FITZ

The plagiarizing SOB! He stole that bit from the Louis Shemenski campaign up in Chicago. I swear to you, that's Louie's soundbyte off of last night's C-SPAN and I can get the tape to prove it!

MITCH

So he's a mugger and a thief. Good to know what I'm up against.

Back to the TV.

NEWSIE (ON TV)

And how do you think your opponent, Mitch Dutton, feels about the issue?

SHAKESPEARE (ON TV)

Well, you can ask him yourself.

(then with that megawatt smile)

If you can find him.

EXT. CATHEDRAL ISLAND BEACHES - DAY

SUPER: JULY. Establishing the heavy tourist trade, crowded beaches all along a boulevard known as The Strand; barefoot babies, sunbathers, roller bladers, melting sno-cones, all under a blazing summer sun.

EXT. EAST STRAND - DAY

Same day, same heat. A CROWD slowly masses before a converted retail storefront with a banner reading: SHAKES CAN! Parked at the curb is a flatbed truck for a riser, where a grinning Shakespeare McCann spoons free ice cream into cones wrapped with red, white, and blue napkins printed with the same campaign motto.

BEHIND THE TRUCK

Marshall Lambeer scans the crowd and barks at a campaign employee.

MARSHALL LAMBEER

C'mon. Get out there and chum the crowd.

VOLUNTEERS instantly move through the crowd with plastic buckets filled with buttons and bumper stickers, handing them out to anybody with an open hand. Then Marshall sees two TV trucks pull up, camera crews rushing. He starts clapping his hands together.

MARSHALL LAMBEER

SPEECH! SPEECH! SPEECH!

Some of the crowd joins in, but Shakespeare holds up his hands.

SHAKESPEARE

Nope. Sorry. All in good time, though.
I'll be dishin' plenty on the important

issues to ya'll. Today's just a little somethin' for your sweet tooth. Now, who wants more?

Finally, TV REPORTERS make it to the front, cameras lifted to the candidate.

TV REPORTER #1

Mr. McCann. Is this just a stunt to jump start your campaign?

SHAKESPEARE

Hell, yes. Shakes McCann is so late to this party his date had to hitch a ride home with the bartender. So until then, I gotta do what I can to get out the message.

TV REPORTER #1

And what is that message?

SHAKESPEARE

Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell, and advertise.

TV REPORTER #2

But ice cream on a hot day. Your opposition might accuse you of buying votes.

SHAKESPEARE

And look at all them smiling faces. I ask you. Is it working?

TV REPORTER #3

Mr. McCann. You have no practical experience in politics. Is this going to be an insurmountable hurdle for you?

SHAKESPEARE

Darlin'? Nothin' a man can't do once he puts his mind to it. As for the other part of your question, the problem with experience as a teacher is the test comes first and the lesson comes later. Come November, you'll see if I made the grade.

The crowd has swelled and blocked the boulevard. Police cars arrive.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, I guess that's me. The law and order candidate.

INT. LAW OFFICE OF DUTTON, GADE, AND SEATON - DAY

Well-appointed, sixth floor suite. Team Dutton is assembled around a conference table - Mitch, Fitz, Rene, and Levy - and two new faces. STU JACKSON. He's fifty, lean, neat, and black. Next to him sits a woman called LANA DEMETRY. Stu opens a folder, removes a check, and slides it back across the table to Fitz.

FITZ

What's that?

STU JACKSON

Your money back.

FITZ

What the hell for?

STU JACKSON

The lousy job I did you.

(turns the folder around)

Shakespeare McCann? I couldn't find a Goddamn thing more than ten years old.

FITZ

There's got to be something.

STU JACKSON

Oh, I know that. But don't ask me what it is. He's got no military record, no draft record. Didn't pay taxes before 1985. And prior to that date, I couldn't find a soul who knew the man. All I got is the last ten years. Businessman, church goin' fella, all around swell guy. Before that, he's a ghost.

RENE

What about his official bio. Did any of that check?

STU JACKSON

School's burned down. Official records destroyed. Far as I could figure, he's got no medical insurance. Or else I'd have found some kind of history there.

Mitch sweeps up the ten thousand dollar check made out to:

MITCH

Opposition Research Inc. Must say, it begs the question. What do you do during non-election years?

STU JACKSON

Play golf. Hustle next year's product.

MITCH

Business is good?

STU JACKSON

Lemme put it this way, if information is power. In politics, it's Kryptonite.

MITCH

Okay. So why not tell us what you do know.

STU JACKSON

The obvious. And that the state party fronted him seventy-five G's as seed dough. Something hinky about the way they did that. I got word that it wasn't the usual jury decision. They weren't supposed to be chasing good money after bad on the fool. Then bingo.

(pulls out a Xerox of the canceled check)

The bank clears a check made out to "The McCann of The People Campaign Committee." So far he's spent most of it on re-upping the old Hurricane Hammond team. Marshall Lambeer included... Then we got the psyche profile. But that's Lana's territory.

MITCH

Psyche-profile?

LANA DEMETRY

Based on the information at hand, a few TV interviews, and of course, the violent "incident."

Mitch fires a look at Fitz.

FITZ

I told Stu. That and Ms. Demetry is a

licensed psychologist. Technically, that makes you a client. So your secret is safe.

(shrugs)

We gotta know what we're up against.

MITCH

What we're up against are jobs headed south of the border! An economy that's not half-as healthy as the people think it is! And metal detectors in fifth grade classrooms! Jesus Christ!

STU JACKSON

Mr. Dutton... Mitch. I'm on your side. I like what you have to say and I believe in what you stand for. But don't go thinkin' your opposition ain't thinkin' the same way about you. They're up to exactly what we're up to. They're out to know you better than you know yourself. And if that means going through your trash...

CUT IN - STREET CORNER

From the cab of a stalled garbage truck, the DRIVER tosses two stuffed plastic garbage bags into the arms of a waiting INVESTIGATOR.

STU JACKSON (V.O.)

Or hiring a shrink to find your number one weakness...

CUT IN - SHAKESPEARE'S CAMPAIGN OFFICE

Shakespeare, Marshall Lambeer, some VOLUNTEERS, and a balding, male SHRINK.

RETURN TO SCENE

Stu and Mitch have locked eyes. Finally Mitch relents. Stu gives a nod to Lana Demetry. She continues.

LANA DEMETRY

My guess is that Shakespeare McCann had an abusive childhood. Probably his father, resulting in some low anger management and no affect tolerance.

FITZ

How about some of that in English?

CUT IN - SHAKESPEARE ON THAT OUTDOOR STAGE

Dishing out some ice cream. Radiant smile. Flashing eyes when the crowd cheers.

LANA DEMETRY (V.O.)

In English, give him an audience or a spotlight and he's most likely enhanced. Meaning, his numbers go up, he's inflated. Grandiose. If they go down, he'll probably blame others, believing that any action he takes to reverse the slide would be appropriate.

BACK TO SCENE - MITCH

MITCH

"Any action?"

LANA DEMETRY

It's a safe presumption that to the adolescent McCann, you represent every grade school or high school star who made him feel diminished... But I'm sure he has limits. Most everyone has limits.

Mitch stands, circling around toward Stu, where he drops the check back in Stu Jackson's folder. Then, crossing to the window, Mitch stares out.

MITCH

McCann told me to look up "campaign" in Websters. So I did. Turns out it means "war."

STU JACKSON

Sorry to agree with him. But politics today isn't about the best man winning. It's about beating the other guy until he yells "uncle."

FITZ

That philisophy doesn't exactly jibe with our candidate.

STU JACKSON

So what do you want me to do with the check?

MITCH

Try not to break any laws.

The vote of confidence is not lost on Stu.

CUT IN - MITCH DUTTON TV COMMERCIAL

Video. Mitch in a classroom, kneeling down with a bunch of multi-colored six-year-olds.

MITCH

What should we do to get ready for college?

VOICE OVER

As a volunteer member of the State Board of Regents, Mitch Dutton drafted a new program that helps Texas families save money for their children's college education - tax free.

MITCH

What do you think about the idea of saving money to go to college?

VOICE OVER

It's the Baccalaureate Bond Program, and so far it's brought in over 75 million dollars to upgrade Texas universities. Good for Texas kids. Good for Texas future.

Freeze frame: Mitch amongst those children.

VOICE OVER

Mitch Dutton for Congress.

CUT IN - DIRECT MAIL MONTAGE

Chugging mail machines, printing, stuffing envelopes, stamps. Sacks of mail dumped at the Post Office. Ending with...

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

A local HOUSEWIFE, baby in her arms, sorts through her mail. She opens the officious, vellum colored envelope to find a snazzy, Mitch Dutton campaign piece. Color picture of the candidate amongst those same

school children.

TEXAS KIDS AND TEXAS FAMILIES ARE FOR MITCH DUTTON

EXT. AUTO ASSEMBLY PLANT - DAY

Rene and a CAMERA crew follow Mitch along the factory floor, while he shakes hands with everyone from the lab-coated technician to the greasy handed worker.

INT. TV TRUCK - SUNSET

With the wide door open, Mitch and Rene review the afternoon's footage. He's wiping his grease-stained hands off with a handi-wipe. When the tape ends.

RENE

High ground enough for you?

MITCH

You tell me. It's hard enough getting over watching myself.

RENE

Why? What's not to like?

MITCH

It's all fine. Good work.

EXT. FACTORY PARKING LOT - SCENE CONT'D

Rene follows Mitch out of the TV truck and to his car.

RENE

Listen. The crew has to hustle up to Houston for another gig. You think you could give me a ride back to the island?

The invite gives Mitch a moment of pause.

INT. MITCH'S VOLVO - IN MOTION - DUSK

Traffic on the span is backed up to standstill. A flashlight knocks at the window. Mitch rolls it down to reveal a COP.

COP

Got a chemical spill up ahead. Gonna have to back up and wait about an hour or so. You can turn around up here.

As instructed, Mitch wheels it around.

MITCH

You hungry?

RENE

Starving.

EXT. PORTOFINO - AN ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A cliff-side retreat, overlooking the channel and beyond, Cathedral Island. A VALET takes the car from Mitch.

INT. PORTOFINO - NIGHT

Packed. Standing room only in the foyer.

MITCH

Looks like it's gonna be awhile. Maybe we can eat in the bar.

RENE

Oh, please. Come on.

Taking Mitch by the hand, she weaves him up to the MAITRE D'. She WHISPERS something. Suddenly, there are two menus in the host's hand and they are being led to their seats. A beautiful, corner spot with a view of the island. A snap of the fingers to a waiter, and complimentary champagne is poured.

MAITRE D'

Very good, sir. I'll send over a waiter right away.

RENE

What'd I say? Easy.

MITCH

What did you say to him?

RENE

I told him you were Mitch Dutton, the congressional front runner.

MITCH

Swell...

(looking back toward the waiting crowd)

How many votes do you think that lost me?

RENE

Candidate believes in waiting his turn.
Hmmm. Not quite the soundbyte.

MITCH

I don't like preferences. How's that?

RENE

Right down the center. But that's okay.
That and you're uncomfortable with being a
celebrity. It's natural. Kinda cute.
Works for the camera.

MITCH

Can we stop talking about me?

RENE

Good boy. A little denial goes a long way.
(with a wink)
Just watch yourself. Or one day you'll
wake up and the grass won't be green
enough, the sky not blue enough, or the
girl in your bed not young enough.

MITCH

That's pretty shallow thinking.

RENE

Sure is. But I'm good at shallow. It's
easy.
(clinks her glass with his)
That and I know what I'm talking about.
Every successful candidate gets to the
point where he wants more.

MITCH

You know this from personal experience?

RENE

I was the girl in the bed.

Mitch practically spits out his champagne. Rene giggles.

RENE

Power corrupts.

MITCH

Absolutely.

RENE

It's an aphrodisiac.

MITCH

Watch yourself, sister. You're talking to the original Boy Scout. True and blue.

RENE

Boy Scout's grow up.

(leans in)

Look at him. The guy in the pin-stripe. You think he has what you've got?

(shakes her head)

Looks good at a glance. A girl might be interested. Then she takes him home and finds out he's more into his Barka-Lounger and TV remote than a good roll in the hay.

MITCH

Question. Is everybody in the campaign racket as cynical as you?

RENE

It's your turn.

(a nod in the other direction)

The blonde with the Bubba over there.

MITCH

What about her?

RENE

You tell me.

Mitch. Uncomfortable, but challenged by those devilish green eyes.

MITCH

Okay... She picked him because he's got some dough. But she's afraid that sixty words per minute won't get her the Cadillac DeVille she's always dreamed of.

RENE

And?

MITCH

She loves him. You can tell by the way she smiles -

RENE

But...

MITCH

When he leaves the house, her best friend's powered by Duracell.

RENE

You got it!

MITCH

I just made it up.

RENE

So? It's just a game. Now it's my turn. Pick the victim.

He can see she won't be satisfied until he does so. Mitch twists around, looking for a suitable victim when his eyes land upon Shakespeare McCann, heading right for him with a young DATE in tow.

SHAKESPEARE

Don't tell me. I wanna guess. The ol' truck turned over on the bridge and you thought this'd be a good place to wait out the clean-up.

(then before Mitch can respond)

'Scuse me. But you must be the beautiful Mrs. Dutton. Shakespeare McCann. The other candidate for Congress.

RENE

Rene Craven. Media Consultant.

SHAKESPEARE

Well kiss my ass and call me embarrassed.

(insincere wink)

And I betcha I interrupted some kind of serious campaign goings on.

(pulls up a chair)

Mind if we sit down?

Mitch steams. The restaurant is packed. He's got to watch his words.

MITCH

Actually, we were having a private conversation.

SHAKESPEARE

I bet you were. And Shakes McCann respects that. So I'll be quick. I got a question for you, counselor.

But the MAITRE D' appears, camera in hand.

MAITRE D'

I'm sorry, gentlemen. But could we have a picture?

Suddenly, they're on stage. Mitch, Shakespeare, their dates, and the entire restaurant watching. Flash goes the camera.

INT. KITCHEN - DELICIOUS DELIVERIES - MORNING

Connie is hunched over the butcher-block counter. The Cathedral Daily Mirror spread out before her and a steaming, cup of coffee untouched. On page three of the lifestyle section is the Portofino photo: Mitch, Rene, Shakespeare, and his date. Gina appears over Connie's shoulder.

GINA

"... Congressional Candidate Mitch Dutton and wife, Connie Dutton."

(sips Connie's coffee)

And Girlfriend, you got a great pair of legs. You get 'em the same place I got my tits?

CONNIE

It's an obvious mistake.

GINA

Oh, I'm sure it is.

INT. OUTSIDE ABBY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mitch watches her sleep. The child splayed across the bed belting out little three-year-old SNORES. Mitch leaves the door cracked open.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

Mitch and Connie are getting ready for bed. She's in the bathroom, he's on the bed, laptop hooked up to a phone line, doing e-mail.

MITCH

Her name's Rene Craven. She's a media consultant.

CONNIE

And why didn't you tell me about her?

MITCH

I thought you didn't want to have anything to do with the campaign.

Connie appears in the doorway. Resolved.

CONNIE

I do now.

MITCH

Fine... So here's how it goes. A dinner's been arranged with Vidor Kingman on his yacht. You're invited.

CONNIE

I'm going to have to buy a new dress.

EXT. HARBOR LAUNCH - DUSK

Connie clings tight to Mitch as a launch pulls away, accelerating toward a massive yacht parked a quarter-mile offshore.

EXT. THE DEANDRA - KINGMAN'S YACHT - EVENING

A deck hand leads Mitch and Connie up the gangway. At the top, the ten gallon-sized Vidor Kingman with his meaty hand outstretched.

VIDOR

Candidate Dutton. Vidor Kingman. Good to meetcha! And you must be Mrs. Dutton.

MITCH

This is Connie.

Hearty handshakes. Rene appears, wearing her usual Armani suit, but without a blouse. She appears on edge.

MITCH

Connie. I'd like you to meet Rene Craven.

RENE

Sorry about that thing -

CONNIE

In the paper. Don't be. Nice to finally meet you.

RENE

(then to Mitch)

Mitch. There's a slight problem. We're not exactly a foursome tonight.

VIDOR

Hell no. We're a fivesome. Missus Dutton? Have you met Shakespeare McCann?

From out of the ship's shadows steps Shakespeare McCann, Dr. Pepper in one hand, the other ready to grip and greet.

SHAKESPEARE

Now, this must be your beautiful wife, counselor.

(then to Connie)

Other night, I thought your husband was married to a redhead. Guess so did the paper. But heck. It was probably my fault in the first place for buttin' my head into your husband's private business. I do hope you'll accept my sincere apology?

CONNIE

Really. It's not necessary.

SHAKESPEARE

And you, sir. Where've you been hidin' this lovely vision? Don't tell me you're a closet conservative. Keepin' the wife home with the cookin'.

Mitch burns. But he sticks out his hand and feigns a cordial greeting.

MITCH

Actually, Connie runs a catering business.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, 'least I got the cookin' part right. Speakin' of food, Vidor. Would you think me impolite by sayin' I'm as hungry as cat in a fish store?

VIDOR

Well, if it's okay with the rest of our guests, we're eating on the top deck. So who wants a tour of the biggest boat in the harbor?

CONNIE

Oh, I do. Please.

Vidor holds out his arm and Connie takes it, turning back to give Mitch a pleased look. She's clueless. Shakespeare tags along, leaving Rene to hang back a step with Mitch.

RENE

I didn't know about McCann. Kingman totally sandbagged me. Said he couldn't pass up a front row seat to the great debate.

MITCH

Well, let's see that we don't disappoint him.

EXT. TOP DECK - KINGMAN'S YACHT - NIGHT

Chinese lanterns sway in the breeze. The dinner party is attended by white-coated, black waiters. Kingman holds court from the head of the table.

VIDOR

You coulda knocked me over with a whisper when ol' Hurricane up and died. That ol' boy and me had us some big laughs in our day.

MITCH

So in search for more laughs, you thought you'd have yourself a private forum. Christians and lions.

VIDOR

Position has it's perks. No mystery that I'm a man who likes to throw his weight around. But for the first time in thirty years, I don't know which way to throw it.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, speaking from the dark horse side of the table -

VIDOR

No no. I'm no handicapper. It's Even Steven from where I sit.

SHAKESPEARE

I was just about to say, I don't think Mr. Dutton knew I was invited. I'm not sure he's prepared.

RENE

Forgive me, Mr. McCann. But my candidate's always prepared.

VIDOR

Is that true, Mrs. Dutton? Your husband comes ready for a rumble?

CONNIE

My Mitch? If you're asking if he's got my vote, well...

Vidor laughs. He loves her.

SHAKESPEARE

Pardon me for being forward, ma'am. But do you know a thing about your husband's campaign?

MITCH

You want to direct your questions to me?

VIDOR

Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. How about we make a dent in some desert?

MITCH

If you don't mind, I'd rather make a dent in my opposition. You want to talk issues? Bring 'em on.

SHAKESPEARE

Ah. The land of the great debate. Ain't America a wonder?

(then to Kingman)

Mind you. I'm not wrapped up in the environmental aspect of that statement, unlike my left leaning competition.

MITCH

If that's a question, I don't see anything at all left leaning about environmental issues.

SHAKESPEARE

Unless it's at the expense of jobs.

(a pointed finger)

You see, I know you, counselor. What's the name of that green-eating group you call clients?

MITCH

They're called The Environment Now Coalition. And they're not my clients. It's The Peterman Company that is.

VIDOR

As in Pete Peterman? I bet you're talking about that golf course he's building.

MITCH

I am. In short, Pete came to me with a problem. He wanted to build a private country club on the old land fill out at Point Shaw. But he was having problems with this particular environmental group who wanted to turn the area into a protected wetland. I put the two groups together and came up with a compromise.

RENE

What kind of compromise?

MITCH

Third party. Korean investors who wanted to build a south coast golf resort. We brought in an architect who had experience with environmental concerns. And now they're building a hotel that'll net South County four hundred new jobs.

Connie smiles, impressed at her husband. So is Rene. Vidor nods and sucks on a cigar.

MITCH

You see? That's the kind of leadership I think we need. Putting competing interests together, showing them the high ground and, in most cases, watching them rise to the occasion.

Shakespeare begins to applaud. Loud and obnoxiously until the floor is

obviously his.

SHAKESPEARE

I'm applauding because that's what everybody does when the groom kisses the bride. When all they've done so far is say, "I do."

CONNIE

If you ask me, I think it's a nice sentiment. It's about hope.

SHAKESPEARE

Until the marriage breaks up and hope ends up on the divorce docket. And we all know it's a statistical fact that more marriages bust than don't. Now, is that good government? A Goddamn wedding vow? I don't think so.

RENE

What's your concept of good government?

SHAKESPEARE

I'll tell you what it ain't. It ain't Big Brother. It ain't a buncha greenie-weenies tellin' me I can't build a plant that could mean thousands of jobs because they want to save some three-toed salamander. You know, that happened out in California. A Goddamn three-digit lizard forced a factory to move out of state.

VIDOR

Sounds like you know your reptiles.

RENE

(under her breath)

Takes one to know one.

EXT. REAR DECK - NIGHT

A slow GERSHWIN tune plays over speakers. Shakespeare sits at the bar, watching the couples dance. The CAMERA HOLDS on Vidor and Rene.

RENE

I'm disappointed in you, Vidor. You sandbagged me.

VIDOR

Well, it's not too late to make-up with me.
I got a Kingman-sized berth right under
your pretty feet.

Rene gives him a "not a chance" look, but finishes it with a teasing smile. The elephant isn't yet in the bag. The CAMERA SWIVELS TO Mitch and Connie.

CONNIE

She's gorgeous.

MITCH

Who?

CONNIE

Don't be coy. I saw you looking at her.
But then again, who wouldn't? I guess I
should be flattered to have people mistake
her for me.

Mitch stops, pushes Connie back a foot to get a good look at her.

MITCH

Speaking of gorgeous -

Shakespeare McCann taps on his shoulder.

SHAKESPEARE

Have a little mercy on a fifth wheel?

Mitch is about to say no, when politely...

CONNIE

Not at all.

McCann takes the reins, Connie giving Mitch a wink as the new couple swings away. Mitch silently burns, then Vidor hands Rene off.

VIDOR

Finish her off, will ya? My sciatica is
killing me.

Mitch and Rene dance, but he's keeping his eye on Connie and Shakespeare. He's talking, whispering, but Mitch can't hear.

RENE

The old man wants to fuck me. So I think
I'll keep him on the hook until he's in the

bag.

MITCH

And when he is?

RENE

You should know by now. I'll do anything
for my candidate.

INT. MITCH'S VOLVO - IN MOTION - NIGHT

On the way home from the dinner party.

CONNIE

He's led such a sad life. Did you know he
lost his wife and child to a drunk driver?

MITCH

Did he happen to give you a day and date?

CONNIE

That's really cold.

MITCH

It's not if it didn't happen. Nobody knows
a thing about him.

CONNIE

Maybe it's personal. Not everyone wants to
put their private life up for public
consumption.

MITCH

And that's what I do? Is that it?

CONNIE

Why does everything have to be about you?

MITCH

All I'm saying is that he's a bad guy and I
wouldn't believe a thing he says.

CONNIE

Why? Because you say so?

MITCH

Connie -

CONNIE

No. Connie can't make up her own mind.
She can't tell truth from fiction -
sincerity from bullshit?

MITCH

You wanted in the campaign. Now that
you've seen it, you can always leave.

INT. CATHEDRAL CITY PLANNED PARENTHOOD - DAY

In a tiny cubicle, an agitated sixteen-year-old with a battered face,
JENNIFER O'DETTS, sits across from a COUNSELOR.

JENNIFER

PLEASE!

COUNSELOR

I'm sorry, but we have rules. And it's
only twenty-four hours.

JENNIFER

But you don't understand! I want it OUT!

EXT. CATHEDRAL CITY PLANNED PARENTHOOD - DAY

Young Jennifer plows through the doors and across the parking lot,
tears streaming from her face.

INT. STU JACKSON'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

The detective is feeding a form into the fax machine.

STU JACKSON

I'm faxing it to you right now.

INT. FITZ'S OFFICE - DUTTON HQ - DAY

Murray pushes through the door and hands the fax to Fitz, who's hooked
up with a telephone headset.

FITZ

Yeah, I just got it.

STU JACKSON (OVER PHONE)

Look in the box where it says father slash
optional.

CLOSE ON - THE FAXED PLANNED PARENTHOOD FORM

Young Jennifer O'Detts had written in Shakespeare McCann's name.

FITZ

Just tell me you know where to find her.

INT. CAROL'S SUNNY NAILS SALON - CATHEDRAL CITY - DAY

Murray Levy ENTERS. His best suit buttoned. He looks cool and trim and out of place amongst the blue haired ladies and lacquered nails.

CAROL

Can I help you?

LEVY

I'm looking for a Miss Jennifer O'Detts.

Her bruises covered in heavy make-up, Jennifer O'Detts peers through the divider curtain at Murray Levy. Her BOTTLE-BLONDE friend joins her.

BOTTLE BLONDE

Looks kinda cute. You know him?

Jennifer shakes her head, then parts the curtain.

JENNIFER

I'm Jennifer.

LEVY

Miss O'Detts. My name is Murray Levy. And I work for Congressional Candidate Mitch Dutton.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DUTTON HQ - DAY

Jennifer is looking nervous. Next to her is Murray Levy, who stands as Mitch ENTERS, followed by Fitz, Rene, and Stu Jackson.

LEVY

Jennifer? This is Mr. Dutton.

Jennifer starts to stand.

MITCH

Please don't stand. And call me Mitch, okay?

JENNIFER

'Kay.

Mitch sits, pulling up a chair opposite her.

LEVY

It's okay, Jennifer. Just tell Mitch what you told me.

JENNIFER

... I don't know where to start.

LEVY

Start with the barbecue.

JENNIFER

Oh, yeah. Like there was this party, you know? For politics.

LEVY

A fund-raiser for McCann.

MITCH

It's okay, Murray. Why don't you let Jennifer tell it her way?

JENNIFER

It was. I mean, for Shakespeare McCann. My dad, he's really Republican, you know? And he likes Shakespeare a lot. So I went with him to this barbecue and... I don't know. I guess, nobody was paying attention and I kinda got drunk.

MITCH

Beer. Wine?

JENNIFER

Lone Star. There was a lot of it. And my dad, I don't know where he was. So this guy Shakespeare, like, the party was for him. But it was like I was the one he wanted to talk to. And I'm just sixteen. So he was all nice and sweet and stuff. I think he was kinda drunk, too.

MITCH

And then what happened?

JENNIFER

There was a big mess after the party. And Mrs. Guidrey, she's like always helping my mom and stuff. So I offered to stay and help with the clean up. And Shakespeare McCann said if I did he'd bring me home.

Jennifer's eyes go watery and red. She gives another look to Murray, who nods his approval.

JENNIFER

That's when he fucked me.

MITCH

He raped you?

JENNIFER

I don't know. I was so drunk. And he was all nice. Like really different from other boys.

RENE

Shakespeare McCann's not a boy. And you're sixteen.

JENNIFER

I'm not a virgin, if that's what you're asking.

MITCH

It's okay.

(Mitch gently turns her face to him)

When did he beat you?

JENNIFER

When I asked him for the abortion money.
He called me a slut and...
(tears again)

MITCH

And.

JENNIFER

... and that he knew by the way I fucked him that I musta done all the men teachers at my school.
(more crying)

So, I got mad and told him that if he didn't pay, I'd say that he'd raped me. That's when he hit me.

She cries some more. Mitch slides over a box of tissues, leaning in. He's quiet. As if it's just the two of them in the room.

MITCH

It's gonna be okay. It's good to let it out.

JENNIFER

What do I do?

MITCH

You don't do anything. You let it go. I know a rape crisis center for teens on the mainland. Doctor's name is Martina Sandoval. It's totally confidential. And she can help you.

JENNIFER

But Murray said I should have Shakespeare arrested.

MITCH

Maybe he should be. But if you filed a complaint it would be really hard on you. Really hard. Hard on your family.

(shakes his head)

No. You've got the rest of your life to worry about.

And for the first time, Jennifer smiles.

INT. CORRIDOR - DUTTON HQ - DAY

Fitz is chasing Mitch down the hall. Fuming.

FITZ

She's a Goddamn silver bullet.

MITCH

She's just a kid.

FITZ

So what? She's your chance to hit the S.O.B. back. Put him down for the whole ten count -

MITCH

I said no! And I can't believe you put her up to this! You're a grown up. You should know better!

INSERT - TV NEWS COVERAGE

Shakespeare McCann being led away from his campaign HQ in handcuffs.

NEWS FEED

... girl named Jennifer O'Detts, who today filed a sexual assault complaint against...

Then microphones stuck in Shakespeare McCann's face.

SHAKESPEARE

The evidence will show that this is a cynical attempt by my opponent to smear me. I am innocent and, as God is my witness, I will be exonerated.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

At this black-tie cocktail benefit, Rene is at Mitch's ear, "steering" him to the big donors.

RENE

(whispers)

James Pennyman, Mutual Finance. His wife's name is Allison.

MITCH

Mr. Pennyman. Mitch Dutton. Pleased to meet you. And this must be Allison, your wife?

Suddenly, Murray Levy is there. He whispers something altogether different to Mitch.

INT. RESTAURANT MEN'S ROOM - EVENING

Mitch shoves Fitz through the door, nearly spilling the rest of the show runner's drink.

MITCH

You did it! You pressed her for the complaint!

FITZ

Got some news for you, pal. She wanted to do it.

MITCH

She's a teenager, for Christ's sake! She doesn't know what she wants yet!

FITZ

No? Well guess what? She said she was so charmed by you, the candidate, that she'd just about do anything for your campaign. She wanted to tell and, not only that, she wanted out of town.

MITCH

What are you talking about?

FITZ

Remember her father? The big McCann fan? Guess he can be pretty mean, himself. After we met with her, the young lady wasn't about to go home and get herself another beating.

(toasts Jennifer)

As for where she is, she's on a bus to New York City. Stu Jackson gave her a little street cash. And don't you worry. It can't be traced to us.

As Fitz is about to bring the rest of his drink to his lips, Mitch angrily lashes out and slaps the drink away. It shatters. Mitch has a finger in Fitz's face.

MITCH

That's it. You're fired. Pack it up and get the fuck out.

INT. HOLLICE WATERS' OFFICE - THE DAILY MIRROR - AFTERNOON

He's hunched over his desk, phone at his ear, wrangling his sources.

HOLLICE

C'mon, Farrel. I already got the arraignment info from my pal in the D.A.'s office. I need details.... Like can you fax me the little girl's statement... Then do it from someone else's machine. Jesus, you gotta have more than one over -

(phone rings)
 Don't hang up, Farrel. Hang on... Hollice Waters.

MARSHALL LAMBEER
 Hollice? It's Marshall Lambeer.

HOLLICE
 Glad you called. You're next on my list. I got five questions, none attestable to you. Starting with this one -

MARSHALL LAMBEER
 We've got the girl.

HOLLICE
 Who? What girl? As in the girl?

MARSHALL LAMBEER
 Listen to me. She's not in New York. She's at her home, with her parents. She's wants to tell the truth. Now, we're giving you the exclusive. But you gotta be there inside the hour so you can make tomorrow morning's edition.

EXT. ACRE LAKES ESTATES - SUNSET

Hollice turns his Saturn through the stuccoed gates. The CAMERA CRANES to reveal a bankrupt, treeless development built around dredged lakes with no water.

INT. O'DETTS HOUSE - SUNSET

Hollice sits at a kitchenette with Marshall Lambeer. MRS. O'DETTS serves instant lemonade just as her gruff, blue-collar husband MILES appears.

MILES O'DETTS
 Mr. Waters? This is my daughter, Jenny.

ENTER Jennifer, hair pulled back, no make-up, bruises gone, looking fifteen, let alone the sixteen years she'd claimed.

MILES O'DETTS
 No sense in wasting a man's time, Jenny. So let's start with the truth.

INT. O'DETTS LIVING ROOM - TIME CUT - LATER

Marshall Lambeer, with his arms crossed, looking out the window at Hollice, whose laptop is open and humming on the picnic table, a cigarette at his mouth and a cell-phone at his ear.

EXT. O'DETTS BACKYARD - HOLLICE

HOLLICE

It checks, Charlie. Instead of writing in her boyfriend's name, she put down Shakespeare McCann on the form. Somehow, the Dutton people got their hands on it and paid her to file the complaint. Two thousand cash and a bus ticket to New York City.

Hollice finishes the cigarette and, looking for a place to toss the butt, crosses to the garage door, opening it to discover a brand new, Cadillac DeVille, window sticker still affixed.

HOLLICE

The family? Mom's on the bottle and dad's on disability.

But the CAMERA HOLDS on Hollice, faced with that brand new Cadillac in the garage.

HOLLICE

Do I believe her story? I say what's not to believe?

EXT. FLOWER HILL - SUNRISE

A new day. Mitch and dogs, out for their run. He picks up the paper, then runs around to the rear of the house.

INT. KITCHEN - DUTTON HOME - MORNING

As is his habit, Mitch comes in through the back door, dogs first. He picks up a banana on the way to the DINING ROOM, where he finds Abby helping Connie set the long table for sixteen.

MITCH

Who's coming for dinner?

ABBY

Mommy's having a party and guess who's coming?

MITCH

Barney?

CONNIE

Children's Defense Board Dinner? And don't tell me you forgot. It's been on your calendar for three months.

MITCH

Okay. So we won't tell mommy that daddy forgot. Should she pardon me?

ABBY

What's "pardon?"

CONNIE

Pardon is if your daddy picks up the centerpiece on his way home.

MITCH

Tell mommy she's got a deal.
(kisses Abby and starts to exit)

CONNIE

Mitch? This one's for me, okay?

Mitch nods, EXITS, but he's left the dirty newspaper on the linen. Abby notices what Mitch hasn't - his picture on the front page.

ABBY

Mommy? Is Daddy famous?

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - MORNING

Connie throws open the shower door. She waves the newspaper at Mitch.

CONNIE

She's only sixteen! And you paid her to lie?

MITCH

What?

CONNIE

I can't believe you did this.

MITCH

I didn't do anything. Gimme that.

Dripping wet, Mitch steps from the shower and grabs the newspaper. He's speed reading.

CONNIE
Sixteen, Mitch! Christ.

MITCH
It was Fitz's deal. And I fired him over it -

CONNIE
Why? So the story wouldn't stick to you?

MITCH
But see it does stick to me! Look at it. It all sticks to me because it's about me! "Mitch Dutton Involved in McCann False Arrest!" It's my name in the paper just like it's my name on the ballot and it's my picture on the posters and it's me on the Goddamn TV!

CONNIE
You used a teenager to make Shakespeare McCann look like a child molester. And just what the hell did he ever do to you?

Mitch wants to answer. But the words catch in his throat.

CONNIE
That's what I thought.
(exits)

INSERT - ANOTHER VIDEO IMAGE OF SHAKESPEARE MCCANN

Freed from his overnight stay in jail, addressing a fusillade of microphones.

SHAKESPEARE
Last night, Shakespeare McCann stood before you a man accused of a horrible crime. Now, this morning, though Shakespeare McCann may be free, my good name is sullied by another man known to you as Mitch Dutton. A candidate for public office who, after bribing a little girl to lie and file false charges, still has enough cock and baloney to ask the honest people of South County for your vote come November. Now, I

ask you, is this our great democracy in action?

INT. MITCH'S OFFICE - DUTTON HQ - DAY

Mitch is seated stoically behind his desk while Fitz finishes up their business.

FITZ

Tomorrow, Thursday, three o'clock. You're on WJMO with Jimmy Daly. He'll have on reps from The National Tax Foundation, so do your homework. For Friday, I set you for lunch at The Greek House with Art Munch. Texas Trial Lawyers Dinner in Houston Friday night. They've got you down for fifteen minutes... Oh, yeah. I nearly forgot.

Fitz pulls two airline tickets from his inside coat pocket and drops them in front of Mitch.

FITZ

I got the National Committee to float us two, first class round trips to D.C.

MITCH

Why?

FITZ

Because for some silly reason, they want to stuff about a quarter mill in your war chest. Just for comfort's sake... So go, don't go, cash the tickets. I couldn't give a fuck.

(leans over the desk)

Sure, your negatives are up, but you still got twenty points on that bastard. So don't forget where you are and where you came from.

MITCH

I won't. Is that all?

FITZ

You don't have a clue what I'm talking about.

MITCH

I don't really care what you have to say anymore.

FITZ

Where you are is twenty points up. Where you came from is nowhere. Until I came along you didn't have a thought in your head about running for office. You were just in the game to score points until somebody appointed you judge... I was the one who saw the opening. I was the one who showed you the way. I was the one saw that you had the goods to get it done.

MITCH

I wasn't supposed to win. Or did you forget that? Hammond was unbeatable.

FITZ

I didn't forget it. But did you ever believe it? No. I don't think so. I think you were right there with me. You saw a chance. And you were willing to take it... I just hoped that in the process you'd grow up.

MITCH

Are you finished?

The two lock gazes for a moment, then Fitz heads for the door, stopping one more time in the doorway.

FITZ

There is something more. Stu Jackson called me this morning. Little Jenny O'Detts? Remember her? She ran away from home last night. Caught a westbound plane to Los Angeles. Told her momma she wanted to be a movie star. Give you one guess who bought the ticket?

Fitz EXITS, leaving Mitch alone to ponder the last bit of info. Rene replaces Fitz in the doorway.

RENE

Sorry. But I overheard the last bit. I'm prepping a release. The McCann camp will

deny any involvement. So it looks like
it's just he said, she said, over and out.

MITCH
Will anyone run it?

RENE
If it's a slow news day.

Mitch is fiddling with those plane tickets. Rene ventures closer.

RENE
Goin' someplace?

MITCH
I'm thinking about going to D.C.

He looks at her. It's an invitation.

EXT. KITCHEN - DUTTON HOME - DAY

Connie's preparing the dinner for twelve, her back to Mitch as he
informs her...

MITCH
I've got an overnight to D.C. I'll be back
tomorrow night. I'm sorry...

She won't even grace him with an answer. She simply keeps cooking.

EXT. FLOWER HILL - NIGHT

A rustling of leaves as the CAMERA TRACKS toward the Victorian. The
cars of dinner guests parked in the drive.

INT. DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

The party is in full swing. Polite cocktail music. Connie playing
hostess, smile painfully painted on as she answers the same question
time and time again.

FEMALE GUEST
So where's the candidate?

CONNIE
Washington, I'm afraid. And he was
devastated he couldn't make it. But the
campaign has it's own demands.

FEMALE

Oh, but it must be so exciting to be married to the front runner.

The doorbell RINGS.

CONNIE

Hard to describe. Excuse me.

Connie goes to answer the front door.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - WASHINGTON D.C. - NIGHT

A reverse SHOT, as if we were expecting to see Connie through the frame of her own house, instead we see Mitch, having just opened the door for Rene. She's wearing a summer, prairie dress, she ENTERS, holding a briefcase in one hand, a wine bottle in the other. As she passes dangerously close to him:

RENE

Compliments of the National Committee.

MITCH

I got the same bottle.

RENE

And a bigger hotel room. You think Fitz might be sucking up so he can get his job back?

At room center is a dinner cart next to a set table. Rene drops the briefcase and lifts the lid on a Chateau Briand.

MITCH

There wasn't much to choose from. Late night menu.

RENE

Did I ever tell you I was a vegetarian?

MITCH

The other's a pasta.

RENE

Good answer. A successful candidate needs to be everything to everybody. So what's it going to be? Dinner first, work later -

MITCH
 (holds a chair)
 Just sit and eat.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

Party's over. Connie pays Rosa some cash.

CONNIE
 Thanks for staying late.

ROSA
 S'okay Mrs. Dutton. G'night.

Connie's closes the door behind Rosa and turns back to the huge mess. She starts the cleanup by first sipping from a bottle of Cristal. The doorbell RINGS. She crosses back to the foyer, thinking it's...

CONNIE
 Rosa?
 (opens the door)
 Gina...

GINA
 Okay, I'm sorry. But I got an excuse.

CONNIE
 It's bad enough Mitch didn't make it. But you --

GINA
 I had a date. And I think you might know him.

From outside the doorframe, Gina pulls into view Shakespeare McCann, megawatt grin on his face. Connie's surprised. But she's not exactly holding the door open.

GINA
 Well, ain'tcha gonna invite us in?

CONNIE
 I'm tired. Abby's asleep. I don't think it's a good idea.

SHAKESPEARE
 Mrs. Dutton? Forgive me, but it's my fault Gina didn't make your party. When she told me, I thought the least we could do is come

by and help y'all clean up.

CONNIE

I'm sorry. It's really late -

SHAKESPEARE

Say no more. You are right. And we are sorry. Aren't we, Gina. Let's get back in the Caddy -

GINA

Connie? At least let me use your bathroom. I swear I gotta pee like a whore in church.

Connie heaves. But how can she refuse. She opens the door.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MITCH AND RENE - NIGHT

The feast is finished. And with wine in hand, Rene pushes open a window overlooking the Potomac, letting in a warm breeze. The hotel room lights go out and Mitch appears from behind. At first, just standing behind her. But she knows he's there. So she waits. His hands start on her back, his knuckles sliding up and down. While his left hand reaches up from underneath, lifting her dress until he's touching flesh, moving up and around to her belly. This is what she's been waiting for.

INT. DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

Disco blasts from the stereo. The living room is filled with pot smoke. Shakespeare is expertly rolling a fresh joint while Gina drunkenly bumps and grinds. She tries to wave Connie over.

GINA

C'mon, Connie. Dance with me.

Connie stands, her arms crossed and angry as hell.

CUT BACK TO - MITCH AND RENE

He's pulling off her dress and she's tugging at his belt. Naked, she grabs the back of a wing-backed chair. Mitch drops to the floor behind her, starting from her calves, up her thighs. His hands are everywhere. Hungry.

CUT BACK TO - CONNIE, GINA, AND SHAKESPEARE

Connie crosses and turns down the stereo in time to hear:

ABBY (O.S.)

Mommy?

CONNIE

That's it. I gotta go up. Really. Gina, sweetie? Why don't you to take the party back to your place.

(heads for the stairs)

And lock up, will you?

CUT TO - MITCH AND RENE

He's in the chair. She's going down on him. He's letting it happen when...

MITCH

No.

RENE

Okay. Then how about this?

Rene starts to crawl on top, legs around his waist. But Mitch shakes his head and shuts his eyes.

MITCH

I can't do this.

Undeterred, Rene puts his face in his hands and kisses him.

MITCH

Rene...

(sadly looks her in the eye)

I'm sorry.

INT. UPSTAIRS - DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

Connie kisses Abby goodnight, tucking the child under the covers. Then as she EXITS and crosses the upstairs landing, she's relieved to see the downstairs light SWITCH OFF. She disappears into the master suite.

BUT DOWNSTAIRS IN THE DARK

Played out on the sofa, Gina rolls over seductively with an eye on Shakespeare. All words are hushed.

GINA

Hey, Mr. Republican Candidate. The party's not over until Gina says it's over.

Shakespeare's eyes swing over to Gina, holding on her until she's slightly uncomfortable. Then he releases that charismatic smile. His body moves as if the music's still playing.

SHAKESPEARE

I was just waiting for mommy to hit the hay.

Suddenly, they're on the sofa, Gina's drunk, legs spread, and fumbling with Shakespeare's fly when:

SHAKESPEARE

Not yet.

Shakespeare reveals a blue capsule.

GINA

What's that?

SHAKESPEARE

Best sex you ever had.

GINA

That some kind of campaign promise?

SHAKESPEARE

Gotta pull the lever to find out.

She opens her mouth and Shakespeare drops the blue bomb.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Dressed and trying to hide her humiliation...

RENE

Keep hanging onto that high ground.

With that parting shot, Rene EXITS, quietly shutting the door to the suite. The CAMERA SWIVELS over to the open window where Mitch sits pensively.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

Gina is so knocked out by the pill, she's fetal and drooling. With the light switched back on, Shakespeare methodically erases the room of fingerprints with a bottle of Windex and a paper towel.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONNIE

The light is left on in the bathroom, revealing Connie in bed with covers thrown off. She sleeps it off. Then a rubbered hand strokes her cheek. Eyes closed, Connie groggily...

CONNIE

Sweetie?

SHAKESPEARE

Say hello to your handsome honey man.

Her eyes pop open. She wants to scream, but a rubbered hand covers her mouth. Connie flails and bucks against Shakespeare, who's naked, already having pried himself between her knees.

SHAKESPEARE

You make a sound, that little one of yours might wanna come investigate. Imagine what she'd think. Her mommy with a real man. Could be a lesson worth learnin'. You wanna call out for help? Go right ahead.

That's when her body relents, easing underneath him. He kisses her with a cold mouth.

SHAKESPEARE

Word to the wise, darlin'. A little sugar goes a long way.
(then with a blue capsule)
Now, open wide.

Connie opens her mouth. Shakespeare drops the pill, then holds shut her mouth until she swallows. Her eyes squeeze out tears of fear.

SHAKESPEARE

Remember to tell him -- you let me in.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mitch wakes to a harsh ring of the telephone. Mitch looks at the clock. It's two in the morning.

MITCH

Hello?

SHAKESPEARE

Hickory Dickory Dock. Guess who just sucked my cock.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DUTTON HOME - SCENE CONT'D

While Connie sleeps off the drug, Shakespeare sits at the edge of the bed with the phone to his ear.

MITCH

How'd you get this number?

SHAKESPEARE

Watergate Hotel. I am impressed. You know they even got an eight hundred number. That means I'm calling you toll free all the way from Texas. You remember Texas, don'tcha? Or do all them marble columns back there make a man forget to take care of his business at home? Did for ol' Hurricane.

MITCH

I'm hanging up.

SHAKESPEARE

You do that. But before you go, here's somethin' about your little girl to make you sleep better.

MITCH

What about her?

SHAKESPEARE

She snores... I swear, cutest little sound I ever heard.

Shakes hangs up. Mitch holds the phone, not knowing what to think. Then he hangs up and dials the hotel operator.

OPERATOR

May I help you?

MITCH

You've got an eight hundred number?

OPERATOR

Yes we do, sir. It's one eight hundred -

MITCH

I don't want the number. It just means that you have automatic caller ID... Which means I want the last number which dialed

my room.

OPERATOR
It's not hotel policy -

MITCH
Look. I can just talk to your boss?

OPERATOR
One moment please.
(long pause)
The number was 209-622-0117.

MITCH
... Are you certain?

OPERATOR
Just a minute ago. Yes sir. Is there
anything else?

Mitch has already hung up, swiveled out of bed and is dialing again.

INT. DUTTON HOME- KITCHEN - NIGHT

The phone RINGS and the machine picks up.

CONNIE'S VOICE
You've reached 622-0117. Please leave a
message.

INT. MITCH'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mitch is madly dressing, on the phone with:

MITCH
Listen to me, Murray. I want you to go my
house. I want you to check on my wife and
daughter... No. Don't ask. Just do. Now!

EXT. WATERGATE HOTEL - DAWN

Rene is chasing Mitch out the door.

RENE
You can blow off the conference, but you
can't blow off the DNC!
(gets in his face)
Look Mitch. You don't wanna know what it
took to make the next ten minutes happen.

So give me this one thing. Ten minutes.
Please.

The door to a stretch limousine yawns in front of him.

INT. LIMOUSINE - IN MOTION - MORNING

Mitch and Rene are seated across from DNC Candidate Chair, MARVE GAINSBOROUGH. To his right is co-chair DAVID LU.

GAINSBOROUGH

It's no secret, Mitch, that we've got big plans for you back here.

MITCH

I'm sorry I couldn't stay for the conference. But it's personal.

GAINSBOROUGH

We understand personal. Just like we understand politics. That's why the national party is prepared to underwrite your candidacy to the tune of a quarter mil. Under two provisions. One? You kick your oppositions ass. Whatever it takes.

MITCH

And two?

DAVID LU

You reinstate Fitz Kolatch as your chief consultant.

MITCH

Is this what you call leverage?

DAVID LU

Fitz says your true calling is the bench. Federal. I think it's a safe bet that we can get you a seat on Judiciary come January.

GAINSBOROUGH

I've talked to Fitz. He screwed up and he's sorry. But believe you me. Running a campaign is no exact science -

Mitch's cell-phone rings. He's on it without so much as saying "excuse me."

MITCH

Murray?

EXT. DUTTON HOME - MORNING

Murray sits in his car, cell-phone at his ear.

MITCH

I didn't talk to Connie. But I caught Gina on the way out. She was doing Connie a favor by taking Abby to preschool. And by the looks of her the two of them went on a little in-house bender last night. And your missus is still sleeping it off. Otherwise, everything seems fine.

INT. DUTTON HOME - ENTRY - DAY

Mitch appears on the stoop to find a yawning front door. He ENTERS to find a uniformed TECHNICIAN wiring up an ALARM KEYPAD.

MITCH

Seen Mrs. Dutton?

The tech gives a nod toward the stairs.

INT. ABBY'S ROOM - DUTTON HOME - DAY

As Connie busies herself by putting Abby's toys away, Mitch appears in the doorway. After a moment...

MITCH

What's with... you know. The guy downstairs?

CONNIE

It's for Abby. You weren't here and she woke up scared last night. That and with your being a public figure and all -

MITCH

Something happen last night that I should know about?

CONNIE

I just told you.

MITCH

Abby woke up scared.

Mitch stands there, expecting more. Connie stops what she's doing, faces him, holds her ground and lies.

CONNIE
That and you missed my party.

MITCH
I'm sorry about that.

CONNIE
I thought you weren't supposed to be back until tomorrow?

MITCH
Plans change. The National Committee dumped a quarter mil in the campaign kitty.

CONNIE
Must've thrilled Fitz. But I bet they didn't find a place for us to live. I hear Chevy Chase is very nice.

MITCH
Are you sure nothing happened last night? I got this strange phone call -

CONNIE
Something did happen last night...
(with a nod)
I decided I want you to win.

MITCH
... I didn't know you wanted me to lose.

CONNIE
I just want you to beat McCann.

MITCH
Why?

CONNIE
Do I need a reason? Because I love you.

Mitch reaches for her, but she turns around in his arms. She doesn't want him to see her face. He squeezes her anyway.

MITCH
I'll win for you, then.

EXT. DUTTON FOR CONGRESS HQ - DAY

As Mitch pulls up in front, Fitz stands before the entire STAFF and VOLUNTEERS. He floats his arms wide with a big grin.

FITZ

There's my boy. Now let's get to work.

EXT. TEXAS TEACHER'S ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE - DAY

A crowded ballroom. An elderly black woman, the teachers' UNION LEADER, introduces Mitch.

UNION LEADER

For teachers. For children. For all of us. I give you, the next congressman from South County, Mitch Dutton.

The crowd bursts into applause. Mitch takes the dais, arms high in acceptance.

INT. MCCANN OF THE PEOPLE CAMPAIGN OFFICE - DAY

A round table meeting with Shakespeare and his campaign staff.

MARSHALL LAMBEER

... tracking shows Dutton's solid with the left, strong with law enforcement and has made inroads to the blue collar work-force. But that's working union, leaving us an opening with the right to work crowd.

SHAKESPEARE

So lemme at 'em.

EXT. UNION HALL - NIGHT

Shakespeare McCann addresses the out-of-work crowd.

SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare McCann is tellin' you your union is sellin' you short. Shakespeare McCann's got a list right here...

(holds up a sheet of paper)

A list of names of state and U.S. legislators your union gave money to, and the same sons of bitches who voted that same NAFTA deal that sent your jobs south of the border! Shakes McCann says you've

got a right to work! Shakes McCann says
you got a right to feed your families!

But that sheet of paper? The one with the list of names. Blank. Not a name on it. Just a prop for McCann's propaganda.

INT. TEXAS TRIAL LAWYERS ASSOCIATION DINNER

To wild applause, Mitch accepts their endorsement along with an embarrassingly gaudy gift. A gold and silver encrusted, .454 REVOLVER, complete with a mother-of-pearl grip, mounted in a glass and cedar display case. It comes with six chromed cartridges neatly tucked into velvet.

EXT. MCCANN RALLY - OUTSIDE CLOSED AUTO-PARTS FACTORY - DAY

The crowd rocks with the chant: "SHAKES, SHAKES, SHAKES, SHAKES!!!" And cutting a path through the center is the grinning Shakespeare McCann, high-fiving all the way. Embellished. Thrilled. Swelled from all the adulation.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Murray Levy works advance. He knocks on a door. A HOUSEWIFE answers.

LEVY

Hi. I'm Murray with the Mitch Dutton for Congress Campaign. Would you like five minutes with the candidate?

HOUSEWIFE

Well, I dunno... I mean, I got a pork roast about ready to go into the oven and a five-year-old with the chicken pox.

LEVY

Boy or girl?

INSIDE THE CAMPAIGN VAN

As Mitch peels off his sweat-through shirt and Rene is pulling the plastic off a fresh, pressed shirt, Levy's voice can be heard over the walkie-talkie.

LEVY

The sick boy's name is Michael. She's got a pork roast about ready to go into the oven.

BACK ON THE HOUSEWIFE'S DOORSTEP

Mitch, dry shirt and a charmed smile on his face.

MITCH

Oh, I love pork roast. And I sure wish I had time to come back for a taste. But while we've got this moment, can I ask you about your family's health care?

EXT. PETERMAN RANCH - DAY

A Labor Day BBQ on this massive spread. A hundred or so GUESTS mill around the massive estate, landscaped grounds, waterfalls, man-made-lake, a huge gazebo where a country band plays some Texas Swing, and a side of beef on a giant spit. Connie is spied schmoozing with other WOMEN.

INT. BOAT HOUSE - PETERMAN RANCH - DAY

While a crowd of GOOD OL' BOYS and their WIVES, hang out at the wetbar watching Texas Tech football, THE CAMERA FOLLOWS a white coated waiter into a CARD ROOM where PETE PETERMAN is seated with, Fitz, Mitch and...

SANDY MULLIN

Pleased to meecha, Mitch.

MITCH

Right. Now, Pete's a long time client. And he tells me you have a proposal to make. But I'll be frank, Mr. Mullin. I'm not much for backroom handshakes. You got something, put it on the table. And please don't be offended if I say no thanks.

SANDY MULLIN

(looks at Pete)

Ol' Boy talks as if he's already got himself the house seat all but locked up.

FITZ

We're eighteen up and headed for the homestretch. So don't waste my candidate's time.

SANDY MULLIN

I won't. Mitch? I'm the CEO and principle stockholder in a company called New Century Industries. We may be multi-national, but

we're still Texas.

MITCH

I'm familiar with your company. You moved your tool and die operation from Austin down to Mexico. Texas lost six hundred jobs.

SANDY MULLIN

Well, with your help, maybe we can get some of 'em back. Now, I'm here to tell you that I've got some five-thousand plus employees total. Eighty-one of them are senior managers. Each of whom, along with their wives, would like to make the maximum individual contribution to your campaign of one thousand dollars.

PETE

That's a hundred a sixty-two thousand dollars.

Pete hands a manila envelope over to Fitz.

MITCH

In exchange for...

SANDY MULLIN

Why, some good Goddamn government, of course.

Laughs from everyone but Mitch. He's heard enough and stands.

MITCH

You'll excuse me, but I've left my wife alone with Pete's -

SANDY MULLIN

Lemme put it straighter, son. Word is they already got you pegged for a seat on the Commerce Committee.

Mitch gives Fitz a look. Commerce? Mitch thought it was Judiciary. Sandy continues:

SANDY MULLIN

That means you'll have a vote on tariffs. You help lower 'em, jobs go south. You raise 'em, jobs stay in Texas.

MITCH

And if keeping tariffs high gives you a stronger margin -

SANDY MULLIN

Then everybody's happy.

EXT. PETERMAN RANCH - DAY

Fitz is following Mitch through the crowd, that manila envelope under his arm.

FITZ

If it was Sandy Mullin's personal check, you could say no and I'd back you all the way. But we're talking over a hundred and sixty individual contributions.

MITCH

Cut the crap. We both know how it works. It's the CEO putting the arm on the head of senior management. Give to my candidate or you're out of a job.

FITZ

It's legal. And it's how it's done.

MITCH

I don't have to like it.

FITZ

No you don't. And when you get to Washington then you can change the rules. Until they, it's play along and get along.

INT. KITCHEN - DELICIOUS DELIVERIES - DAY

Connie appears, gives Gina a perfunctory look before reaching for an apron. Gina has her purse dumped on the cutting board. She's applying lip gloss.

GINA

It's about time you showed up.

CONNIE

Sorry. I've been helping Mitch out with the campaign -

GINA

Oooh, there's a change of tune. Maybe we should just put out the for sale sign? Because lemme tell you, sister. I'm not running this business alone.

CONNIE

That's right. Gina's strictly front office.

GINA

You wanna dig in the dirt? How's this one for you?

(parodying Connie)

"Mitch better not win. Cuz if he wins, I'd rather be divorced in Texas than married in Washington."

CONNIE

You brought that man into my house!

GINA

Excuse me, but you invited us in.

CONNIE

My house, Gina!

GINA

And what Mitch doesn't know -

CONNIE

- and that's just the way it's gonna stay!
You hear me?

EXT. EAZY 8 MOTEL - NIGHT

A 1975 Impala tracks along with Gina as she sashays down a row of motel room doors. She stops at the end, jangles a key toward the darkened car, then with the key in the door, disappears inside. The car wheels into a space.

INT. EAZY 8 MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Shakespeare ENTERS to find Gina cross-legged at the edge of the bed, short skirt showing as much leg as possible and a blouse unbuttoned down to her navel.

GINA

Like what you see?

SHAKESPEARE

How'd a girl with your kinda money end up
so trashy?

GINA

Takes a big ol' trust account to keep me
lookin' this cheap.

Shakespeare ignores the tease, crosses and shuts the curtains, then
returns to her.

SHAKESPEARE

You said you had something for me.
Something I can use.

GINA

First things first.

She goes to unbuckle his pants but he pushes her away.

SHAKESPEARE

I'm fifteen points back with less than
eight weeks to go. So don't make me wait.

GINA

... You want it? Okay, fine. Mitch had an
affair.

SHAKESPEARE

Can you prove it?

GINA

Sure I can. He had the affair with me.
And I'll swear to it. TV and everything.
I'll tell the whole world that me and Mitch

-

Smack! She didn't see it coming. Shakespeare backhands her across the
bed. Then he's got her by the hair.

GINA

You fucker -

SHAKESPEARE

You're lyin'! Ask me how I know!

GINA

You think I'm scared of you? Like you're
the first cracker that ever hit Gina Sweet.

SHAKESPEARE

I know you're lyin' cuz you're too cheap!
Said it yourself. That self-righteous
sonofabitch wouldn't touch you less it was
in a church!

(pulls her right up to his face)

Now, get me something I can use.

GINA

I can give you more money.

SHAKESPEARE

I don't need your Goddamn money! I need
information.

CUT IN - TV COMMERCIAL

Black and white pictures of Mitch, unflattering expressions, coupled
with a VOICE OVER.

VOICE OVER

*Mitch Dutton has served on the boards or
received support from eleven corporations
which have sent a total of three thousand
good Texas jobs to foreign countries such
as Mexico, Malaysia, and South Korea...
With Mitch Dutton in congress, could your
job be next?*

(then the legal button)

*Paid for by the McCann of the People
Campaign Committee.*

INT. TV EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Rene operates the board, with Fitz to her side and Mitch in a rage at
just having seen the commercial.

MITCH

It's bullshit. I don't serve on a single
corporate board. And where did they get
those numbers? My work with most of those
companies has been about building jobs, not
sending them south.

FITZ

Sticks and stones, my friend. That's the
game they're playing. They hit you, you
hit back.

RENE

There's one more they're starting in heavy rotation.

On the monitor, another commercial, with facts and figures to match the ad copy.

VOICE OVER

Did you know how many lawyers there are in government today? Over three hundred in state elected office. And in the House of Representatives, four out of every five congressman are... you guessed it, lawyers... Mitch Dutton is a lawyer. Is it any wonder he wants to be in Congress, too?

Mitch fumes.

FITZ

Hurts, doesn't it. Show 'em what we got to hit back with.

One last commercial, images to match.

VOICE OVER

Shakespeare McCann wants to be your congressman. But do you know who he really is? Or do you know anybody who does? The fact is, nobody knows where Shakespeare McCann's really from, or where he grew up, or if he really served in the military, or if he really is named Shakespeare McCann. Can you trust your children's future to a man without a past?

(a picture of Mitch)

Mitch Dutton's record is trustworthy and clear. Community leader and crusading activist for your South County rights. Paid for by the Mitch Dutton for Congress Committee.

MITCH

I'm tired of playing defense. Let's run with it.

Fitz slaps Mitch's leg, is out of his chair and EXITING, leaving Rene alone with Mitch. An uncomfortable beat.

RENE

... Vidor Kingman offered me a job running his radio group in West Virginia. But he wants me to start before November... I told him no.

MITCH

Then why tell me?

RENE

... to see if you cared.

EXT. OFFSHORE OIL RIG - ESTABLISHING

A calm day. The rig is miles off the Texas coast.

INT. RIG OFFICER'S QUARTERS - DAY

Calvin stands before the officer's desk.

CALVIN

You can' do this. I got me five lil' kids. That's four -

OFFICER

Can't do nothin' about it, Cal. Cutbacks is cutbacks and you ain't got the seniority.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - OFFSHORE OIL RIG - DAY

Calvin is cleaning out his locker when he discovers amidst the stares of his fellow WORKERS...

CALVIN

Who stole my meds... It ain't funny, man. I need my Goddamn meds! So step up! Who took 'em!

EXT. PORTSIDE BAR - EARLY EVENING

POV from a Cadillac parked in the shadows. A dejected Calvin heads into the bar. PULL BACK to reveal Shakespeare McCann in the driver's seat, shades on, cowboy hat brim pulled low. In the passenger seat, a battle-scarred, broken-nosed PUG.

PUG

I buy him how many drinks before I start with the trash-talk?

SHAKESPEARE

As many as it takes. You'll see it in the eyes. Just make sure he wipes the floor with you before you cry uncle.

(stuffs a wad of cash into Pug's pocket)

Now, move it. I gotta make me a phone call.

INT. TALK RADIO STUDIO - EARLY EVENING

Talk radio meister BARRY JARRET has Shakespeare on the phone hooked in with other callers.

BARRY JARRET

This is Barry Jarret on Talk 88. We're here with Republican congressional candidate, Shakespeare McCann, and we're talking with Rayleen in Fort McClintock.

CALLER #1

Hi, Barry. I'm a Democrat. And so far, I'm kinda leaning toward Dutton because he talks like a winner. And isn't that what we need in office. A winner?

INTERCUT BACK WITH:

EXT. PORTSIDE BAR - INSIDE SHAKESPEARE'S CADILLAC

Shakes does the talk show via his cell-phone.

SHAKESPEARE

Hey, Rayleen. Shakes McCann here. And if you're asking if my opponent is still ahead in the polls, well, yes he is. But lemme ask you a question. You got kids?

CALLER #1

Sure do.

SHAKESPEARE

Would you feel safe havin' 'em walk to school all by their little selves?

INT. PORTSIDE BAR - NIGHT

Calvin is drinking with Pug. Empty long necks litter the table.

CALVIN

Fuckers. All of 'em. And seniority? My ass. Cuzza the fact that I'm a black man in a white man's job.

PUG

No shit. Curse of the nigger-class. Can't get ahead in America. No way, no how.

CALVIN

Fuckin' A...

(thinks about it)

What you call me?

PUG

Nigger-class. Somethin' wrong with that?

Calvin's eyes are dilated. Wide and unblinking. Staring dead on at the pug and full of rage.

CLOSE ON - CALVIN'S FINGERS

As they wrap around an empty long-neck.

INT. BACK TO RADIO SHOW - SHAKESPEARE IN HIS CADILLAC INTERCUT WITH BARRY JARRET IN THE STUDIO

Waiting for the next call, Shakes washes back a handful of EXCEDRIN with a bottle of Pink PEPTO BISMOL.

BARRY JARRET

We've got Yvette calling from way out in Hitchcock. Hi, Yvette.

YVETTE

I'm voting for Mitch Dutton because he's handsome. Is there anything wrong with that?

SHAKESPEARE

Lemme guess, Yvette. Y'all think that handsome is as handsome does.

YVETTE

You might say that.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, I say lawyer is as lawyer does. And we all know about them lawyers.

SIRENS in the b.g. A smile crosses Shakespeare's face.

SHAKESPEARE

Listen, Barry. It's always good talkin' at ya. But Shakes McCann's gotta get along and get the word out. G'night all.

Shakes hangs up, then puts the Caddy into gear. He pulls out just as the paramedics appear.

INT. MITCH'S OFFICE - DUTTON HQ - DAY

Fitz bursts in while Mitch is in the middle of a call.

FITZ

Do you know a Calvin Frost?

MITCH

I'll call you back.

(hangs up)

Yeah. So what about him.

FITZ

He killed a guy in a fight last night. A white guy. Says you're his lawyer.

EXT. MCCANN OF THE PEOPLE HQ - DAY

Shakespeare McCann stands before a phalanx of microphones.

SHAKESPEARE

My opponent. Mitch Dutton. As legal counsel for one Calvin Frost, was personally responsible for seeking, and I quote "early release" for this killer. And only months ago, "intervened" when this murderer had violated his probation...

INT. FITZ'S OFFICE - DUTTON HQ - DAY

Fitz hooked up to that headset, rolling through the media calls.

FITZ

No. Mitch Dutton emphatically denies ever being Frost's acting legal counsel. As for the intervention, that was only once. And that was at the request of a Superior Court judge when Frost's public defender fumbled the football.

INT. VIDEO EDITING STUDIO - MARSHALL LAMBEER

The EDITOR puts the last touches on the new attack ad for Marshall Lambeer. A mug shot of Calvin Frost is frozen on the monitor.

AUDIO V.O.

As legal counsel for Calvin Frost, Mitch Dutton stepped in not once, but twice, using slick lawyer tactics and sneaky political connections to put this killer back on our streets.

MARSHALL LAMBEER

It's good. I was just thinking. The mug shot. Can we darken it up a bit?

Sure thing. With just a few strokes of the keyboard, the editor shifts Calvin's natural eggshell coloring to a far darker shade of black.

EDITOR

How's that? Black enough for ya?

MARSHALL LAMBEER

Dupe it. Ship it. Run it.

INT. BILL'S BIG SCREEN TV - DAY

Inside the retailer, fifty projection screen TV's are running the same college football game. Then comes the break and the Calvin Frost attack ad. White CUSTOMERS stop their jawing and watch. Transfixed.

INT. POLLSTAR, INC. - DAY

And one of those solicitors dialing from her list.

SOLICITOR

Are you a registered voter? May I ask you a few questions? Good. If the election were held today, how would you cast your ballot? Mitchell Dutton, the Democrat. Or Shakespeare McCann, the Republican?

Enter Marty Chang into the shot.

MARTY CHANG

Fitz ol' pal. You're not gonna be happy.

INSERT SHOT - POLLSTAR'S COMPUTER MODEL

Dutton and McCann are running dead even. This translates to:

INT. DUTTON WAR ROOM - THE BIG BOARD

DUTTON: 42 MCCANN: 42 UNDECIDED: 16

Mitch appears in the doorway in time to see Fitz screaming into his headset.

FITZ

Goddammit, Marty! I'm losing traction down here. Gimme an issue I can draw blood with!

(hangs up; turns to Mitch)

You wanna turn this around?

MITCH

Thought's crossed my mind.

FITZ

Then come the night of the big debate?
Figure out how to walk on water.

INT. BARBECUE PALACE - DAY

Practically empty. Shakespeare slips into a rear booth to join Hollice Waters.

SHAKESPEARE

So?

HOLLICE

So what?

SHAKESPEARE

So don't waste my time. I've got a campaign to win.

Hollice slides a manila envelope across to Shakes.

HOLLICE

Awhile back I get this call from a friend of mine in North Carolina. Said he heard from some ex-con back thataway who was passing through Texas. Heard one of your radio spots and thought he recognized the voice.

Shakes opens the envelope and withdraws a color-copied arrest sheet with attached photo. It could be Shakespeare. But then again, it's not. Shakespeare reads the name.

SHAKESPEARE

Bill Whitlow? Don't recognize the fellah.
You?

HOLLICE

Not sure. Took some work, but I got it from a source down in Jacksonville. He swears he busted this fellah for running a buncha sophisticated long-cons. Fraud schemes. Ponzi scams. That sort of shit. But hell if anybody could dig 'em up. No fingerprints, no other mug shots, no prison records. Zero. Remind you of anybody?

SHAKESPEARE

Nope.

HOLLICE

Of course, I could continue my research. Bound to turn up something worth a headline.

(frames the headline)

"Candidate McCann Wants To Put The Con Back In Congress."

SHAKESPEARE

You're circlin' but you don't know where to land.

HOLLICE

No? How's this? Chief of Staff. You make it to The House? I'm along for the ride. It's that simple.

SHAKESPEARE

Talk to Dutton. It might be lookin' even, but he's the front runner and I'm still the Dark Horse candidate, quietly takin' up the rear.

HOLLICE

Ah, but you're hot. You've got the momentum... Anyway, if it swings the other way, I can always deal with Dutton.

SHAKESPEARE

So why now? Why today? Why not wait until
I'm the front runner?

HOLLICE

Because my editor is up my ass for
something to lead with the day of the
debate. Something that gets his nipples
hard, if you know what I mean.

SHAKESPEARE

I don't know what you mean.

HOLLICE

Something to put this "Who's Shakespeare
McCann" question into perspective.

SHAKESPEARE

I got polling that says nobody gives a good
Goddamn about where I've been or what I've
done. Only what I wanna do.

HOLLICE

I still got that one headline.

SHAKESPEARE

(big grin)

Hollice Waters wants close to the flame.

HOLLICE

Only because Shakes McCann is hot.

Shakespeare leans back, as if to get a better look at Hollice. Sizing
him. Then appears that patented, megawatt grin.

INT. TV STATION KDRL - STAGE B - NIGHT

There's a flurry of activity in the studio as lights are being
adjusted. STAND-INS at the podiums are there for CAMERAMEN to rehearse
their angles. A TV DIRECTOR barks over their headsets. Meanwhile, a
side studio monitor reveals the local newscast from another studio.

NEWS ANCHOR

In just minutes, we'll be cutting short our
usual news broadcast to go live into KDRL's
Studio B for the first debate between
Congressional nominees Mitchell Dutton and
Shakespeare McCann. No longer a dark horse
candidate, McCann has moved to practically

a neck and neck position in our KDRL polling. So it looks like tonight's going to be a real horserace.

INT. MAKE-UP ROOM - MITCH AND SHAKESPEARE

Each in their respective chairs getting made-up by separate STYLISTS. You can cut the tension.

EXT. BASS LAKE - NIGHT

A single, bass boat powered by electric motor trolls. A Coleman gas lantern ignites the face of the STOGIE smoking fisherman, who casts his lure while listening to his radio.

RADIO HOST

... as we wait for the candidates to appear, one might want to look back and take stock of the last few months of a campaign that might be characterized as a little bit contentious.

STOGIE

No shit -

But he's hooked something. It's no fish. The line's snagged.

STOGIE

Sonofabitch!

Stogie maneuver's the boat over toward the snag, taking in line until he's close enough to gaff whatever his precious lure's caught hold of. Then the fisherman's face turns white as Hollice Water's dead body bubbles to the surface.

INT. CAMERA POV - STAGE B - NIGHT

A headsetted STAGE MANAGER simply replaces the name card of panelist HOLLICE WATERS with MARTIN ANDERSON.

Meanwhile, Connie, wearing a fire engine red blazer and skirt, is escorted by Murray Levy and seated in the first row behind the panel. A camera instantly swings on her, the red light blazing.

TV DIRECTOR

Is that Dutton's wife? Tony? I'm getting a lot of noise off her outfit. Let's back off the chroma.

CUT TO - MURRAY LEVY AND CONNIE

He's about to leave her when she clutches him.

CONNIE
Aren't you staying?

LEVY
I can't. I gotta run over to the Ramada
and run the focus group.

Over in the corner, Fitz shakes hands with Marshall Lambeer. Bullshit smiles. Good luck and all that crap. Then over the public address comes a booming voice:

TV DIRECTOR
One minute to air. May we have the
candidates, please? Panelists, take your
seats.

THE PANEL

Three local journalists, KEVIN MCWORTER, MARGO WALLACE, and MARTIN ANDERSON, take their seats.

FROM BEHIND THE STAGE

Appears Mitch to a smattering of applause, moving up to his donkey embossed lectern. Shakespeare is nowhere to be seen.

STAGE MANAGER
Fifteen seconds.

Still no Shakespeare. Shrugs from all around the stage.

TV DIRECTOR (OVER HEADSETS)
Where the hell's the other candidate?

STAGE MANAGER
Five seconds. Four, three, two...

Finally, Shakespeare appears from behind the curtain, sweating, smiling, dabbing his face with some white scrap of cotton. Red lights go on.

TV DIRECTOR (OVER HEADSETS)
We're live. See if we can get 'em to shake
hands first.

The stage manager gestures to have to the two shake hands in the middle.

TV MONITOR

A two-shot, then the camera slowly zooms as Shakespeare whispers something in Mitch's ear, suddenly turning the Democrat to stone.

CUT TO - GREEN ROOM - FITZ AND RENE

FITZ

What the hell did he say to him?

BACK TO - MITCH AND SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare leaves Mitch with that make-up soiled scrap. They split and go to their respective lecterns, where Mitch unfurls the rag out of camera view. It's a pair of women's panties. Mitch fires Shakespeare an angry look, then flashes a glance across the stage to Connie. She's trying to remain composed. But under Mitch's fearful eye, she begins to shake and shudder. Tears stream.

SHAKESPEARE

One more smile and wink at Mitch. It's all becoming clear so very clear.

MARGO WALLACE

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.
Television KDRL and the Cathedral League of Women's Voters are proud to bring you the first debate between candidates for the thirty-first congressional district of Texas. Our format this evening consists of an opening statement from each of the candidates of two minutes apiece, followed by an open forum of questions and answers from our panel, then two more minutes apiece for closing statements. A coin toss has determined that the Republican candidate, Mr. Shakespeare McCann, shall begin first. Mr. McCann.

SHAKESPEARE

Ms. Wallace. I would like to yield my two minutes to my esteemed opponent. Mitch?

TV DIRECTOR

What the hell? Go to three.

CLOSE ON - MITCH

Burning. Eyes locked on Connie. She's crumbling under his stare. Shaking her head. She mouths "I'm sorry."

GREEN ROOM - FITZ AND RENE

Watching on the monitors where Mitch stands. Frozen.

FITZ

What the fuck's wrong with -- Somebody stick a pin in his ass and tell him to start talking!

But Rene, she sees something only a woman can see. The oncoming rage of jealousy.

MITCH

He drops his head. He could cry... or he could kill.

MARGO WALLACE

Mr. Dutton. Mr. McCann has yielded his opening remarks to you.

SHAKESPEARE

How's this? I'll start for him. Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Mitch Dutton and I'm just another lawyer runnin' for office. I love my wife. I love my little girl. But mostly I love killers like Calvin Frost

-

INT. DIRECTOR'S BOOTH

In a video blur, Mitch does an about face, crosses all five monitors, covering the ten feet between lecterns and lowers a hammering right fist across Shakespeare's skull. The two go careening off the stage and out of camera shot.

INT. GREEN ROOM

Rene's jaw drops and Fitz heads for the door.

FITZ

Jesus H. Christ...

INT. STUDIO B

Mitch is on top of Shakespeare, pummeling until Fitz and Marshall are there to pull him free. Shakespeare is bloodied beyond belief. While Mitch simply walks past the frozen cameras, past the panel to Connie.

MITCH

Let's get out of here.

She takes his hand and they cross sideways to the first door marked with the green EXIT SIGN.

STAGE CREW

Clears a path to the bleeding Shakespeare McCann. He wobbles, looks for the cameras, spits blood as he points after Mitch...

SHAKESPEARE

COME BACK HERE, YOU S.O.B. I'M GONNA HAVE
YOU ARRESTED! EVERYBODY SEE THAT? I'M
GONNA HAVE THAT SONOFABITCH ARRESTED FOR
ASSAULT!

The TV CAMERAS hold on Shakespeare.

INT. GREEN ROOM

Fitz slams the door, locks it, leaving just himself and Rene.

FITZ

I don't care what you have to do. I don't
care what you have to say.

A sudden POUNDING at the door. VOICES.

RENE

What's there to say? Our candidate just
assaulted the opposition!

FITZ

Just spin it! Okay?

Fitz throws open the door to reveal a CROWD OF SHOUTING MEDIA. He shoves through them all, leaving Rene to hold up her arms.

RENE

Your attention please! We will have a
statement just as soon as we all get
organized.

INT. MITCH'S VOLVO - NIGHT

Windows down. Warm breeze. Both he and Connie drive in silence. Then slowly he reaches over and touches her hand. What's been bottled up for weeks turns into a cascade of tears.

MITCH

Whatever it is... whatever it was.
Whatever - happened... I promise it's gonna
be okay.

INT. RAMADA HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

With the twelve-member FOCUS GROUP feasting on free pizza in the b.g., Murray is on the phone with:

MURRAY

Fitz! Where are you?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FITZ'S BMW - IN MOTION - NIGHT

FITZ

Looking for a liquor store. If I were you
I'd do the same.

MURRAY

So we can toast the winning debate? Mitch
really KO'd McCann.

FITZ

Laugh when you're in the unemployment line.

MURRAY

Fitz. Listen to me. I wasn't joking. The
focus group? They all got off on it. I
mean, not everyone. There was one old lady
who said it made her sick to her -

FITZ

Slow the fuck down. Are you talking about
our focus group?

MURRAY

Ten out of twelve. Thought McCann had it
comin' for whatever the hell it was he
whispered in Mitch's ear at the top of the
program.

Out of the corner of his eye, Fitz sees a roadside bar. He wheels his BMW off the highway.

FITZ

Call you back.

INT. ROADSIDE BAR - NIGHT

Half-crowded. Jukebox playing C&W. OLD BOYS shooting pool in the back. Fitz makes a beeline for the bar, slaps down a twenty.

FITZ

Dewars straight up and the remote control
to your TV set.

The BARTENDER serves up the remote first, the booze second. Fitz starts flipping channels, stalling on a post debate, LIVE ON THE STRAND interview.

INTERVIEW #1

I don't know what to think. I guess the other guy got what was comin' to him. I mean, why else would Dutton tee off like that?

INTERVIEW #2

I gotta say, I thought Dutton was a wimp from day one. Now, I'm thinkin' I'm gonna have to re-think my thinkin', if you know what I mean.

BARTENDER

Hell, we had that on. Shoulda heard the whoop that went up when that Dutton fella whomped that shithead Republican.

(points to a chalkboard above the
bar)

We actually started a top ten list of what the shithead said to Dutton.

Sure enough, Fitz looks at the chalkboard behind the bar. Scribbled are the top ten things Shakespeare said to Mitch. Number one? "A bad lawyer joke."

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Under the harshness of E.R. lighting, a young RESIDENT moves in on Shakespeare's bloodied and disfigured face with a needle full of...

RESIDENT

Just a little prick to getcha numb before I
can sew.

(then with a wink)

Now, what y'all are supposed to sayin' is,
"you should see the other fellah."

The NURSE whispers in his ear. The young resident's demeanor changes completely, having just been told the identity of his patient. Nurses GIGGLE in the b.g. And Shakespeare doesn't miss an embarrassing lick of it.

EXT. DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

TV trucks park on the lawn. Lights are blazing as REPORTERS prepare for their eleven o'clock stand-ups.

INT. DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

Mitch is shutting all the curtains, cutting out the glare. His right hand is swollen, elevated up against his chest. Connie delivers a glass of water and some ibuprofen then barks up the stairs at Rosa.

CONNIE

Shut the curtains and keep Abby in her
room.

Knocking back the capsules, Mitch collapses on the sofa. Connie kneels at his feet and puts her head in his lap.

CONNIE

I'm so sorry.

MITCH

I'm not. Actually, I'm glad.

(looks at his swollen first)

After what he did to you? No. For the
first time in a long time, I'm proud of
what I did.

CONNIE

But you can't let him win.

MITCH

Connie. He's going to have me arrested for
battery. He's probably swearing out the
complaint right now. What do you think all
the TV trucks are for? To get my
statement? Sorry. They want to see me in

handcuffs.

The phone RINGS. Connie's reaching for it.

MITCH
Don't answer it!

CONNIE
It could be Fitz.

MITCH
Whatever it is, it's bad news. Now,
c'mere.

Mitch holds Connie close. She folds into his arms.

CONNIE
It's over, isn't it?

MITCH
Yes, sweetheart. It's over. It's finally
over.

INT. FITZ'S OFFICE - DUTTON HQ - MORNING

On the chalkboard: DUTTON 49% MCCANN 41% UNDECIDED 8%

FITZ
Mitch. It's a miracle. We got us a whole
new ballgame.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MITCH'S LAW OFFICE - MORNING

Mitch has a phone to his ear and a new cast on his right hand.

MITCH
Well, the ballgame's called on account that
I don't want to play anymore. Glad as I am
for what I did to that prick, I don't think
I'm as cut out for public service as I
originally thought. I'm still waiting for
the cops to come knocking on my door.

FITZ
Not gonna happen. I talked to Marshall.
They're not pressing charges. With these
new numbers, they wanna play this thing

down.

MITCH

You're still not hearing me.

FITZ

So what am I missing? He had it coming and you gave it to him. We were just lucky that it was on TV during a thirty-four share.

MITCH

I've asked Rene to put together a statement. When she's done, I'm calling a press conference and withdrawing.

FITZ

The hell you are! The momentum is back. We're taking this to the wire with an eight point spread!

MITCH

All because I hit the sonofabitch.

FITZ

Don't forget who drew first blood.

Mitch stares out the window at the Gulf. A storm brews on the horizon.

MITCH

Give me the day to think about it.

FITZ

Well don't think too much without talking -

CLICK. Mitch hangs up on Fitz. The CAMERA SWISH PANS over to Rene, seated cross legged on the couch.

FITZ

Why the hell didn't you tell me he was preparing to withdraw?

Because she's in love with him. It's all over her face.

FITZ

Sonofa-BITCH!

EXT. DELICIOUS DELIVERIES - EVENING

The last COOK leaves, switching off the lights to the kitchen. Meanwhile, Gina's left behind to rummage around the office looking for a joint. Finds one. But now she's looking for a match. She can't find one, so she wanders into the darkness of the kitchen and over to the cooktop, using a pilot light to ignite the joint.

SHAKESPEARE

That's clever.

Gina jumps with a start. Shakespeare is just a shadow, ten feet away.

GINA

What are you doing here?

SHAKESPEARE

I was going to ask you the same question.
You've been out of town.

She turns back toward the lights of the office, trying to get some distance. He follows.

GINA

I was away on business. Girl like me's
gotta keep on the latest in cuisine, you
know?

But when she turns around, Shakespeare has stepped into the light. She can see his mangled, stitched face.

GINA

Shit on a stick. What happened to you?

SHAKESPEARE

And to think I didn't believe you when you
said it.

GINA

Said what?

SHAKESPEARE

That you don't follow politics.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Mitch steps from the elevator and heads for his Volvo. He chirps the alarm, opens the door and sits. No sooner does he shut the door when a cord is pulled around his neck and twisted tight around the headrest.

Shakespeare appears from behind, a folding knife at Mitch's ear.

SHAKESPEARE

Keys in the ignition. Back out carefully,
and make a left once we leave the
structure.

INT. MITCH'S VOLVO - IN MOTION - THE STRAND

Very carefully, Mitch steers the Volvo down the rain-swept boulevard.
The windshield wipers thump back and forth.

SHAKESPEARE

No sir, I didn't think you had it in ya. I
overplayed my hand and you got me real
good.

MITCH

What did you expect me to do?

SHAKESPEARE

Look bad. Stutter. Sweat... Hell, up
till then, I played you pretty much
perfect. Right up to we was dead even.
Who'd a known you'd knock me on my ass
right on TV. Erase the wimp-factor in a
single move.

MITCH

Broke my hand in three places.

SHAKESPEARE

You wanna compare battle scars?

(close, so Mitch can see in the
rear view)

Look at me! I said look! Five days till
the big day and I can't show my face
without reminding every Goddamn voter about
the whoopin' I took.

MITCH

So put a bag over your head for all I care.
I'm withdrawing from the race.

SHAKESPEARE

Horseshit.

MITCH

I'm pulling out. I've got a press

conference set for tomorrow noon. It's not worth it anymore. You can have the seat. Hell, you deserve it.

SHAKESPEARE

No can do, counselor. Your name's already on the ballot. Ain't no erasin' it. And the absentees already been mailed. Best I can do is get me back to even.

(gestures left)

Turn up that street. Right up there.

Mitch waits for the oncoming traffic to pass, then pulls up the dark, slanted street.

MITCH

So what are you gonna do? Kill me?

SHAKESPEARE

Don't think I haven't thought of it. Hurricane was hard enough to pull off without nobody wisin' up. And your ol' pal, Hollice Waters? Well... he was just a pest.

Hurricane? Hollice? It cuts right through the medication.

CUT IN - FLASHBACK FOOTAGE

Hurricane leaning up against that tree. Shakespeare with a needle stuck into the old man's carotid artery, firing off an eight cc volley of air. Then Hollice. His body set to drift in the bass marsh.

BACK TO SCENE - MITCH AND SHAKESPEARE

The car is stopped on the darkened slope, some one hundred yards off The Strand.

SHAKESPEARE

Naw. I don't want to kill ya. I want you to lose. To me. I want to hear you concede on television.

MITCH

In your dreams.

SHAKESPEARE

Don't forget what Hurricane used to say. It's never too late for a comeback... And

I'm about five minutes from upping your negatives into the stratosphere.

Shakespeare steps out of the car, moves to the right rear tire and punctures it with the knife. Suddenly, he's back at the passenger side door, having slung it open to give Mitch one last look at his mangled face.

SHAKESPEARE

I'll be seeing you on election day.

Dropping the knife on the passenger seat, Shakespeare slams the door, pulls the rain hood over his head and charges down the sidewalk toward The Strand. Mitch goes for the knife, slicing away the nylon cord that ties him to the headrest. After a moment's breath, he's dialing up the cell phone.

OPERATOR

911 Emergency.

MITCH

I'd like to report...
(stalls)

CUT IN - FLASH FORWARD

Slow motion. Election night coverage. Music. Cameras swiveling off stage just as the candidate is about to enter. But which candidate?

BACK TO SCENE - MITCH IN THE CAR

Frozen, pondering the images in his mind. The implications of the moment still unclear.

OPERATOR

Sir? You'd like to report an emergency?

Automatically, Mitch reaches forward and presses the END button on the phone. He's thinking.

MITCH

McCann? Just what the hell are you up to?

After a moment, Mitch opens the door and steps out into the rain, walking around to assess the damaged tire. Mitch looks up and down the street for a clue to:

MITCH

Five minutes until what?

Resolved to change the tire, Mitch pulls his jacket up over his head, goes to the trunk, pops the lid to reveal...

GINA SWEET

Splayed in his trunk, dead, bloody, and butchered. Her eyes fixed and staring up at Mitch. The repulsed candidate stumbles backward toward the curb, falling on his ass. Only then does he realize that he's still holding that knife in his hand.

CUT IN - FLASH FORWARD

And the rest of the election night scene. More slow motion. Shakespeare McCann ENTERS, stepping up on the dais, big grin, arms raised in victory!

BACK TO MITCH

The implications are suddenly clear. His wife's best friend! His car! The knife in his hand!

EXT. PAYPHONE ON THE STRAND - NIGHT

SHAKESPEARE

Yes, sir. I was just driving up Sunnyslope Drive and I think I saw that congressional candidate fellah. You know, the one on TV? Dutton or somethin'. I think he was havin' some trouble fixin' a tire. I woulda stopped to help, but I got me a bad case of arth-er-itis?

EXT. SUNNYSLOPE DR. - MITCH

Panicked. Back on his feet, he's at the trunk. At first, repulsed by Gina's body, he's got to act. He reaches into the side well and grabs the tire jack, dropping it to the sidewalk. Headlights sweep over the knoll and down toward the main drag. Mitch freezes, his head stuck in the trunk. The car passes without notice.

The spare tire is pinned under Gina's body. Mitch can't get at it. He pushes and pries, but without removing the body...

Then he sees it. Stuck in the corner tucked under Gina's head. Mitch reaches for and grabs the aerosol bottle, spinning it around to read the label under the dim trunk light: FIX-A-FLAT!

INT. POLICE CRUISER - NIGHT

Sunnyslope Drive, just ahead on the right. The PATROLMAN flips on his overhead lights just as he wheels up the street. He stalls the car at the bottom of the drive, headlights looking up the darkened street. And he sees nothing. No Volvo. No candidate.

PATROLMAN

Dispatch? This is 28. I'm lookin' up on Sunnyslope and I don't see no car with a flat and I don't see no candidate... Shit, and I just wanted to shake his hand.

INT. VOLVO - IN MOTION - NIGHT

Mitch at the wheel, driving across The Span toward the mainland. A cold sweat broken out on his forehead. He reaches for the cell-phone.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RENE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Surrounded by boxes, she's packing. She picks up the cordless phone on the first ring.

RENE

Hello.

MITCH

It's Mitch. And I need you to listen carefully.

RENE

Look. I've been doing some thinking -

MITCH

Do you care about me?

RENE

Is this a trick question?

MITCH

You either do or you don't.

Rene hates the question. And she nearly hates him for asking it. Now. Not when she's about to leave.

RENE

I say yes, I get hurt. I say no? What? I

get fired?

MITCH

Listen closely. I need you to go to my house, tell my wife to pack a bag for her and Abby. Then I need you to drive them to the airport.

RENE

Excuse me? Your wife and daughter?

MITCH

Don't ask me to repeat myself.

RENE

Jesus, Mitch... And you want me to do this?

MITCH

They might be in danger. And right now, you're the only one I can trust.

Rene stalls. Stuck.

RENE

I don't know -

MITCH

You'll either do it or you won't. Now, what's it gonna be?

EXT. RURAL ROUTE 4 AND THE GULF HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The road forks. Mitch steers the Volvo up RR4. The rain is beginning to pelt.

INT. DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

Connie opens the door.

RENE

You might not understand this. As a matter of fact, I don't understand it myself. But your husband just called me and asked me to do him this one favor.

EXT. LEVEE ROAD - NIGHT

Mitch drags Gina's body from the trunk and rolls her down the levee into the marsh. Standing over his handiwork, he drops to his knees and

pukes.

INT. PENTHOUSE HOTEL ROOM - LATE NIGHT

A huge suite overlooking the harbor, this is Vidor Kingman's personal hotel room. And while Marshall Lambeer is in a heated argument with Kingman, Shakespeare is keyed on the TV, flipping channels with a remote in one hand and, with the other, washing back more EXCEDRIN with a bottle of PEPTO-BISMOL.

VIDOR KINGMAN

Five days left and you are behind. And now you want more? How much soft money do I gotta dump into this campaign. And for what?

(pointing over at Shakespeare)

Your dog won't hunt!

MARSHALL LAMBEER

A hundred thousand dollars. We get the volunteers to hit the opposition's partisan poor. Work the South County projects. Twenty dollars for every Dutton vote that stays home. It worked in Jersey, I think we can work it here.

VIDOR KINGMAN

Work it, work it!

(approaches McCann)

And what does he do? Watch the TV to see his face on the ads which I paid for?

SHAKESPEARE

Shut up!

(turns up the volume)

VIDOR KINGMAN

Goddammit! I want my money's worth -

SHAKESPEARE

I said shut up!

(flipping channels)

It's been three hours! It's gotta be here.

(stands)

Where's the big story, you assholes!

Finally, Shakespeare takes that beer bottle and hurls into the TV. The TV tube explodes and sparks.

VIDOR KINGMAN

That's it! You're responsible, Marshall!
You're the one that talked me into this...
this mistake!

EXT. HOUSTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - NIGHT

Curbside, Rene is dropping Connie and Abby off. But Connie has a question. She's just thinking how to phrase it.

CONNIE

I read somewhere that it's better for the
wife not to know...

RENE

But you can't live that way. I understand.
(then)
He loves you more than you know. And
certainly more than I ever understood.

Enough said. Connie gives Rene and confident smile and steps out.

EXT. HOUSTON HIGHWAY 11 - NIGHT

Four lanes. Dark, spattering rain. Few cars. Intro MARTA REYES RODRIGUEZ in her Ford Fiesta, still wearing her "HI, MY NAME IS MARTA," sticker from a Texas State Social Reformers. Ahead she sees a fireball rising from underneath an overpass. Terrified at the sight, she stomps on the brakes, sending her little car into a slide and nearly ditching it.

MARTA INVESTIGATES THE ACCIDENT

A Volvo down a steep embankment, crushed against the concrete, engulfed in flames. Not far from the car lies Mitch, face down in the dirt. A truck horn SOUNDS. Marta waves down the truck.

EXT. HIGHWAY 11 - LATER

Traffic is backed up for a mile. Rene is stalled. Through her beating windshield wipers she can see a fire up ahead.

EXT. THE VIRGIN MARY MERCY HOSPITAL - DAY

Establishing.

INT. TEACHING CLASSROOM - DAY

The room is packed with the same old local MEDIA FACES, cameras, etc.

Lights blaze as Mitch is wheelchaired before a cluster of microphones. His face is lacerated and flashed from the car fire.

MITCH

I have a brief statement, then you can get back to your families and, more importantly, The Cowboy game.

A smattering of laughter. From the corner smile Fitz and Rene, their candidate still showing charm and a sense of humor despite the grave circumstances.

MITCH

Last night, after returning from dropping my wife and daughter off at the Houston airport, I was followed by a pick-up with what could best be described as politically motivated hoodlums.

CUT IN - FLASHBACK

An empty highway. Mitch, looking both ways to make sure there are no cars coming from either direction.

BACK TO PRESS CONFERENCE - MITCH

MITCH

After what I might call some dangerous road play and some rather abusive taunting, this same pick-up truck ran me off the road and into a concrete overpass.

CUT IN - MORE FLASHBACK

Mitch steps into his Volvo, prays over the SRS airbag, then carefully leaving the door ajar, straps on his seatbelt and puts the car into gear and starts down the embankment toward the concrete of the overpass.

BACK TO PRESS CONFERENCE - MITCH

MITCH

Thank God for airbags. Luckily I was able to crawl from my car before it exploded.

INSERT - FLASHBACK

Mitch crawls from the wreck all right, scraped and battered, barely able to stand. Only to return to the car's open gas receptacle. In

the distance, he sees headlights nearing. He must hurry. He reveals a road flare, twisting off the top and using the scratcher to ignite it. But the rain. It won't ignite. The car grows closer. Closer. Mitch keeps at the flare until it finally sparks and catches. Then, inserting it into the gas tank, he shoves it down the hatch, turns to run just as the car erupts into a fireball, knocking him to the dirt unconscious.

BACK TO PRESS CONFERENCE - MITCH

The media is a mass of hands and CLASHING QUESTIONS, but one rises above them all.

MITCH

Do I blame my opposition? As in Shakespeare McCann? I blame him for the kind of rhetoric that might have provoked this kind of violence... But I also blame myself.

(holding up that casted right arm)
Some might argue that I started this.
Three nights ago before the debate. And if I did, I'm truly sorry.

BLURTING REPORTER

Mr. Dutton. There's been a great deal of speculation as to what exactly McCann said to you before the debate to prompt such a violent response.

MITCH

To repeat it would dignify the remark itself. So I won't.

ANOTHER REPORTER

What about the rumor coming from the McCann headquarters that you had something to do with the murder of Hollice Waters?

MITCH

I went to grade school with Hollice Waters...

(chokes up)
I pray for his family.

A nod to the nurse and Mitch is wheeled off despite the other calls for questions. Fitz takes over at the microphones.

FITZ

Calm down. We'll get to each and every one of you.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Mitch is dressed and sitting on the edge of the bed. Rene with her arms crossed as a MOTHERLY DOCTOR shows Mitch the prescription bottles. Fitz and Murray Levy are in the corner.

DOCTOR

Demerol. For your broken hand. Klonopin for sleep. And this is an antibiotic to guard against -

MITCH

I got it. Instructions on the bottles?

DOCTOR

I want you to think about what you're doing. You're lucky you're alive.

MITCH

Okay. Which brings up a question for you, Murray... What would've happened if I'd died?

FITZ

Let's not even go there. You didn't die. We're ten points up and -

MITCH

Shut up. I asked Murray a question... Murray?

LEVY

Well... Ballots have been printed. Absentee's in the mail... That means, on election day, it all depends on the outcome. McCann wins, then McCann wins. Simple. But if you, the deceased wins, then the Texas Secretary of State proclaims the seat vacated and calls for a special election within sixty days. That would mean McCann up against somebody new nominated by the Democratic Central Committee.

FITZ

This is morbid as hell.

MITCH

And if I win the election and die the next day?

LEVY

Whole new crap shoot. Both sides retire their nominees. McCann would have to beat a whole new field of candidates to secure his party's nomination.

Mitch nods his thank-you.

MITCH

Never too late for a comeback.

FITZ

No need for a comeback. You're alive. And on Tuesday, you'll be a congressman.

MITCH

I'd like Rene to drive me home.

EXT. DUTTON HOME - DAY

Rene's parked in front. No traffic. No TV trucks. As Mitch steps out of the car.

RENE

Someday, you'll explain all of this to me.

MITCH

Crimes have been committed. And what you don't know can't hurt you.

RENE

You sure you don't want me to stay. I mean, you were just in a major car accident...

(suspicious about it)

Mitch? You were in a car accident?

Mitch lets his eyes do the talking.

MITCH

McCann's got one last card to play. If I were you, I wouldn't look back.

RENE

And if I do?

He answers with a kiss. On the lips. Their last chance.

MITCH

What can I say? I'm no good at shallow.

RENE

The candidate with a heart. Alert the media.

Mitch watches Rene put the car in gear and pull out of the driveway before heading for the front door.

INT. QUICK SHOTS - DUTTON HOME - DAY

Mitch locks all doors and windows. Then at the ALARM KEYPAD, he arms the perimeter.

INT. MITCH'S STUDY

Opening the bottom drawer of his desk, Mitch comes up with that gift from the Texas Trial Lawyer's Association. The silver and gold inlaid .454 revolver. Mitch removes the revolver from the display case and loads it with those six, chromed cartridges. But as Mitch discards the box into the waste basket, he doesn't read the warning.

CLOSE ON - THE PRINTED WARNING ON THE DISPLAY BOX

"CAUTION! FOR DISPLAY ONLY! NOT FOR ACTUAL USE!"

Next, settling in his office chair, Mitch dumps a pocketful of prescription pain medication out onto the desktop. Finally, he switches on the TV, briefly channel surfs, and lands on a Shakespeare McCann commercial. Staring at the opposition's face...

MITCH

It's just you and me, pal.

But the CAMERA MOVES off Mitch, tracking across the study to a closet. The door is cracked. With the CAMERA MOVING INSIDE the darkness of the closet, reveal:

SHAKESPEARE MCCANN

Motionless. Seated on the floor. A sliver of light across his stitched face. He pops a capsule and patiently waits.

INT. MITCH'S STUDY - LATE NIGHT

And the CAMERA cruises the study, revealing a half-eaten TV dinner, an open bottle of Vodka, pills spilled across his desk, and the TV on. A Dutton for Congress commercial plays between news bytes. HOLD ON Mitch as he tries to stay awake. But his eyes flutter. Sleep is overcoming him. He shifts his position. Eyes open again, widening then closing. He can't fight it anymore. Sleep arrives with a quiet snore.

CUT TO - THE CLOSET DOOR

As it slowly, silently swings open.

INT. MITCH'S STUDY - EVEN LATER

And darker, too. Reveal Mitch, sleeping in that big leather desk chair. He suddenly wakes, eyes fluttering open from his narcotic-induced sleep. At first, they focus on the late night TV re-run, then pan right to see the man sitting on the couch across from him. Shakespeare McCann. Instinctively, Mitch lurches for the gun. But it's not on his desk. That and his arms are duct-taped to his chair.

CLOSE ON - SHAKESPEARE

Seated across from Mitch, scratching his sweaty temple with the revolver's gold and silvered muzzle. McCann looks like he's been awake for days. Bone white. Dark circles under red, drug-popped eyes. Has madness finally set in? Or some kind of twisted remorse?

SHAKESPEARE

Pretty gun... And to tell you the truth, counselor. I don't know what I'm gonna do with it.

MITCH

... That so?

SHAKESPEARE

Oh, I thought of killin' you... I even thought of killin' myself. Then I thought, fuck it. Kill you, then me. Put the public out of its misery. Am I right?

(shakes his head)

No, no.... It's all gone way too far! This ain't how it was supposed to happen!

MITCH

And how was it supposed to happen?

SHAKESPEARE
NOT LIKE THIS!

Shakes is on his feet, half-buckled over a wrenching gut. He swigs on a bottle of Pepto-Bismol.

SHAKESPEARE
My fuckin' stomach... I'm peein' blood.
This campaign it kicked my ass real good.
(then he wheels on Mitch)
SHUT UP!

MITCH
I didn't say anything.

SHAKESPEARE
Didn't have to. I say fuck you and your slick lawyer shit. All my life I been one step behind you boys. Education. Know what I had? A mattress for a momma and daddy that thought lovin' me was bustin' my head open with a monkey wrench!

MITCH
Sad story. Why don't you tell somebody who gives a shit.

Shakespeare puts the gun up against his own ear and cocks the hammer.

SHAKESPEARE
Yeah? Tell me you don't give a shit. Tell me you'd rather I blow my brains out than yours.

MITCH
Is that supposed to be a hard question?

SHAKESPEARE
You fuck! You don't know what it's like!

MITCH
I have no idea -

SHAKESPEARE
- Trying to measure up!

Shakespeare squeezes his head between his hands, his eyes shut.

SHAKESPEARE

I get headaches, you know? Bad headaches.
And then I close my eyes and hear all the
folks cheering - Shakes, Shakes, Shakes!
(practically crying)
And after all I've done... I can still lose
this thing.

Once again, Shakespeare has that gun up to his head, cocking and
uncocking the hammer. Waving the gun around. Cocking the hammer
again.

SHAKESPEARE

One shot, see? The headache goes away.
(lurches over the desk)
If you was my lawyer, how would you advise
me?

MITCH

I'm not your lawyer.

Shakespeare levels the gun right at Mitch's head. He could kill him
right now.

SHAKESPEARE

For argument sake, let's say you are.
Would you advise me to leave a note?

MITCH

(flip)
... Sure. Why not? If you felt compelled.

SHAKESPEARE

And say what? I'm sorry for losing to your
slick ass?

MITCH

Why not just start from the beginning.

SHAKESPEARE

With Ol' Hurricane? Or are we talkin' even
before that.

MITCH

No. Hurricane's a good start.

SHAKESPEARE

So I killed Hurricane. Then what?

MITCH

If it's an act of contrition, I'd go all the way.

SHAKESPEARE

Hollice. The girlfriend. Right. Okay. All of it... I'm gonna need somethin to -

MITCH

Top drawer left.

Shakespeare leans over the desk, opens the top left drawer and removes a yellow legal pad. He then snags Mitch's Mont Blanc pen. With a shaking hand, Shakespeare is ready to write.

SHAKESPEARE

Okay, now help me out. What do I say.

MITCH

I'd keep it simple. I'd start with the date.

SHAKESPEARE

October thirtieth. Okay?

MITCH

Then I'd write, "With great regret, I murdered George Hammond. I murdered Hollice Waters. And I murdered Gina Sweet... All because I wanted to be a United States Congressman."

At this moment, Shakespeare stalls. He gently sets the pen down without any of the earlier shuddering. The obvious pain and sweat suddenly erased by that trademark smile and an oh-so-cool posture as he leans back in his chair and stares at Mitch.

SHAKESPEARE

Word games. Ain't they a hoot? And you dumb lawyers. Think you're so good with "argument." But a good con man... He can make ol' Lucifer sing "Praise Jesus, Son of God."

Shakes tosses the Pepto-Bismol into the waste basket. Then from his pocket he withdraws a mini-cassette recorder. He hits REWIND, then PLAY.

MITCH'S VOICE (PLAYBACK)

"... then I'd write, 'With great regret, I murdered George Hamm - "

As the tape rewinds again, Mitch drops his head. He sees the trap he's fallen into. Shakes picks up the telephone, dialing 911.

OPERATOR

911 Operator.

Shakes plays the tape into the receiver.

MITCH'S VOICE (PLAYBACK)

"With great regret, I murdered George Hammond. I murdered Hollice Waters. And I murdered Gina Sweet. All because I wanted to be a United States Congressman."

And as Shakes eases the phone back into the cradle, Mitch simply shuts his eyes, realizing that Shakespeare had just played him for the last time. Perfectly. Shakespeare slides around to Mitch, putting one hand on Mitch's forehead and trying to force the gun muzzle into Mitch's mouth.

SHAKESPEARE

Okay. Open up. Let's get this thing done with.

Mitch struggles, but Shakes succeeds in forcing the muzzle into his mouth.

SHAKESPEARE

I promise to send flowers to your wife and little girl.

Mitch bucks at the restraints, gagging on the barrel. But to no avail. Shakes has control of the situation, pulling the trigger. The hammer falls with a dull, metallic THUNK. A dead chamber? Shakes pulls the trigger again. The hammer rising and falling again. THUNK! Three more rounds, THUNK, THUNK, THUNK! The gun won't discharge.

SHAKESPEARE

Sonofabitch!

Shakespeare withdraws the gun to check the chambers. Mitch coughs and heaves with momentary relief.

SHAKESPEARE

What kind of gun is this?

MITCH

The kind that's never been fired.

Using the gun like a pair of brass knuckles, Shakespeare swings the revolver frame into Mitch's skull and knocks him over, chair and all. He hammers Mitch again and again.

LIVING ROOM

Shakes drags the half-conscious and bloodied Mitch toward the kitchen.

KITCHEN

Shakes drops Mitch in front of the oven, opens the door and blows out all the pilot lights. After which he turns on all the burners on high. Gas spews.

Speeding through Plan B, Shakes opens all the drawers and cupboards, sweeping out the contents, looking for anything that would make a spark. Spying the TOASTER OVEN, Shakes grabs a handful of paper towels, wads them up and shoves them into the little door. He turns the unit on LOW.

Shakes returns to Mitch, where he unbinds Mitch's wrists and legs. Mitch is left, head resting on the oven door. Shakes EXITS the kitchen.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

Shakes checks outside, careful to switch off the porch lights. Darkness. No emergency vehicles yet. He unlatches the deadbolt, and pulls the door open to the ear-splitting SOUND OF THE ALARM! And the front drive is suddenly blazing with alarm-triggered KLIEG LIGHTS.

KITCHEN

The alarm stirs Mitch.

BACK TO THE FRONT DOOR

Stalled, Shakes throws the door shut and turns to head out the back when -

MITCH!

Charging out of the darkness. Bloodied and swinging a baseball bat like a hatchet. Shakespeare ducks, but the bat shatters his collar bone. Mitch swings again, catching Shakes in the knee. It crunches under the bat and Shakes crumples to the floor. Mitch stands over him,

bat held high, ready to strike the final blow.

SHAKESPEARE

Wait!

(hands up)

How you gonna explain why you killed me?

MITCH

... I was performing a public service.

Mitch raises the bat, only to stall at the SOUND OF SIRENS. He has another idea.

MITCH

Better yet. I'll let you explain it. That way we can both come clean.

With the bat, Mitch smashes Shakespeare's other knee. Then Mitch drops it and heads for the front door.

INT. KITCHEN

In the toaster oven, the paper towels catch fire.

EXT. DUTTON HOME - NIGHT

Under the blaze of emergency lights, Mitch steps out to greet the arriving EMERGENCY CREWS. As he turns to point toward the open door and Shakespeare, the house erupts into a fireball. FIREMEN hit the deck. Mitch is blown backward to the gravel. PARAMEDICS race in to pull Mitch to safety.

EXT. DUTTON HOME - DAWN

The entire house is a pile of rubble. FIREMEN rake through the mess while NEIGHBORS and MEDIA FOLKS rubber-neck from behind police lines. Meanwhile, Mitch sits at the rear of a medical van. While a paramedic attends, a COP appears.

COP

You said there was an intruder?

MITCH

Yes.

COP

Well, whoever he was. He musta got out. Ain't nobody in that pile.

ON MITCH

He stares at the smoldering house.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Same as the one from the very first scene. Mitch sits at the edge of the bed, suit coat across his lap, watching the TV.

MALE ANCHOR

It's official. Channel 9 predicts the Democrat, Mitchell Dutton, the winner by an eight point margin, over the Republican dark horse, Shakespeare McCann. Not much of a surprise here, considering the whereabouts of the Republican candidate have been unknown since the historic brawl of a debate just seven days ago.

A knock at the door. Murray's voice behind it.

MURRAY

Mitch? You ready?

MITCH

I'll be just a minute.

FEMALE ANCHOR

The shrouded campaign was days ago, capped off by the tragic fire that destroyed Mitch Dutton's Flower Hill home.

Mitch flips off the TV. The bathroom door opens and Connie appears with Abby.

CONNIE

Is it that time?

ABBY

How do I look, Daddy?

Mitch gives them a solid once over, then he warms.

MITCH

I ever tell you that you're the prettiest girls in the room?

Abby beams. And only Connie knows what's coming.

INT. HILTON BALLROOM - NIGHT

Slam-packed and rocking. As Mitch arrives at the dais, he's greeted by a smiling Rene, a thrilled Fitz, and Stu Jackson with a handshake. When Mitch withdraws his hand, he finds that Stu's left a tape in it.

MITCH

What's this?

STU JACKSON

(in Mitch's ear)

A call to 911. That's the original. And I promise, there aren't any copies.

Mitch is momentarily stunned.

STU JACKSON

I know what you're thinkin'. Did the best man win? Or did you just beat the opposition?

(then with a warm smile)

If I were you I'd think about it this way. It's a short ride to Washington and you're only two years away from a re-election campaign. I'll be lookin' to keep my job. And I reckon, so will you.

After a moment, Mitch gives an understanding nod, then takes the dais with one hand held high, the other clutching Connie's. Finally, when the crowd cools...

MITCH

I accept your nomination!

The place goes wild. And just as Mitch raises his arms in a victory salute, he catches sight of a man. Could it be Shakespeare? Shaved head and dark glasses. Hobbling on crutches. But obscured by the crowd. And as quickly as he appeared, he's vanished.

ON MITCH

Did he see a ghost? Or the real thing?. He doesn't know. He paints back on his glory smile and continues waving. But Mitch's eyes. They betray him. He's wondering if Shakespeare's still out there. Waiting for another day.

END