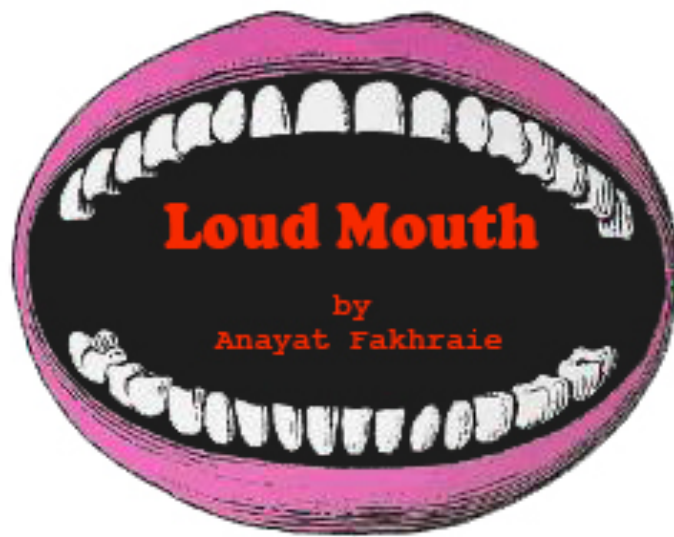




# ECHO LAKE

## ENTERTAINMENT



Based on a true story.

ECHO LAKE / Dave Brown / James Engle / Chelsea Benson  
GERSH / Bob Hohman / Bayard Maybank / Ian Greenstein

“In the old days men had the rack.  
Now they have the press.”

- **Oscar Wilde**

**INT. SAN FRAN. AIRPORT BATHROOM - DAY**

It's empty, save for a lone man in his late 50s.

With a hangdog expression on an already droopy face, he looks like hell. And, as he stares down his reflection in the mirror, he feels like it too. Meet MORTON DOWNEY JR.

**SUPERIMPOSE: 1989**

A slow PUSH IN on his hollow face...

MORT (V.O.)

Anybody ever asks you a question about the Morton Downey Jr. Show, the answer is always - yes. We got junkies, cops, congressmen, feminazis, freaks, faggots, and perverts in primetime. Hate niggers? Kill whitey? Think men are pigs? You're the pig. And I'm the butcher here to bleed you. Sluts, dopers, pukers and bimbos. I slice 'em all. And y'know what? America loves me for it. So if anybody ever asks you a question about the Morton Downey Jr. Show, what are you gonna tell 'em?

TIGHT on Mort's face as --

-- he draws a SWASTIKA over it with a marker.

Then the DRUMS kick in. PRE-LAP music over...

**INT. PACKED STUDIO - WWOR-TV STATION - SECAUCUS, NJ - NIGHT**

A rowdy audience CHEERS! Going absolutely insane for --

**SUPERIMPOSE: 2 YEARS EARLIER**

-- a swagger and a smile. MORTON DOWNEY JR.

A toothy grin, a pinky ring and a sportscoat wrap him in style and authority. One thing's clear: he thinks he's the tits. And, judging by his fans, he's right.

He HIGH FIVES the crowd. Grabs a PRETTY WOMAN. Kisses her.

Then, Mort's up on the STAGE. Spinning toward the CAMERA:

MORT

Y'know we got a lot to thank God  
for as we celebrate the birthday of  
the greatest nation in the world.  
But right now - as we BBQ in our  
backyards - there's a war going on  
in the streets of America. A war on  
drugs, the slime that smuggles them  
in and the lowlifes who sell them  
to our kids. But guess what? Now  
there's even a group that says:  
*"Hey, let's legalize ALL the drugs.  
Make them as American as apple  
pie."*

The crowd JEERS in disgust. He raises his hands. Silence.

MORT (CONT'D)

It's the same ol' crap, gang. And  
as usual, the politicians haven't  
done squat. I say, legalization my  
ass! Hell no. Drug dealers? Drug  
sympathizers? Prepare to fry!

The audience goes WILD! A ridiculously '80s INTRO follows...

#### ON SCREEN:

... Depicting a cut-out of Mort, smiling, yelling and  
pointing at random images. Tanks, apple pies, guns, babies  
and guitars. It looks like a televised acid trip.

BACK TO:

#### INT. PACKED STUDIO - LATER

Two PODIUMS for the audience. Two GUESTS on stage.

And it's a madhouse. People screaming at each other while  
Mort, the ringmaster, looks on. CIGARETTE clinging to his  
lips. He smirks, loving the carnage.

Then, his hands go up. Silence.

He points to one of the tormented guests - a young ACTIVIST.

ACTIVIST

Look. Under the Libertarian  
society. No. We don't fight the  
Vietnam wars, we don't fight the  
Korean wars and we don't fight the  
drug wars because --

MORT  
 (top of his lungs)  
 -- Yeah! 'Cause you're too busy  
 getting HIGH!

Mort pinches his cigarette like a blunt. Puffing and dancing. The crowd eats it up.

Desperately trying to save himself, the Activist holds up his hands. No mercy. An audience CHANT drowns him out: "*JUST SAY NO! JUST SAY NO!*" Everyone's on their feet. SHOUTING.

This debate's cooked. And its chef couldn't be happier.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

We don't see the audience, but the sound of them RUSTLING in the dark is unmistakable. A spotlight ON STAGE illuminates --

-- an ECU of a MOUTH with a cigarette hanging from it.

PULLING OUT, we see -- MORT. He addresses us, the audience:

MORT  
 (breaking the 4th wall)  
 Listen up, gang. You bought the ticket. Your ass is in the seat. So I'm going to level with ya. You don't need to know that my father was a famous singing cunt or that my mom killed herself five days before her 52nd birthday. She was a cunt too, by the way. No. That's all bullshit. True. But bullshit. All you need to know is that it was the '80s in America and I was finally gonna get mine. A star on the walk of fame and a chance to change television forever!

He throws up his arms for emphasis.

MORT (CONT'D)  
 I had only been on Channel 9 for two months. My fan base was strong and growing. But, most importantly, I was hitting the issues that mattered.

(MORE)

MORT (CONT'D)  
However, there was just one fuckin'  
tiny shitty little problem... My  
show? Stunk.

BACK TO:

**INT. BACKSTAGE - WWOR-TV STATION - NIGHT**

The circus has died down as a few JERSEY BOYS linger at Mort's feet. He AUTOGRAPHS their shirts and cigarettes.

TOUGH JERSEY  
Yo, Mort. You fuckin' killed it  
tonight.

FAT JERSEY  
Yeah. Really put that fag in his  
place.

MORT  
Appreciate it, fellas.

Suddenly, a VOICE lobs a hardball:

VOICE (O.S.)  
That show sucked, Mort!

Mort looks up to see --

-- BILLY BOGGS, a shaggy haired liberal in a hand-me-down suit. With the cocky smile of a guy in his early 30s, this Philly native is no stranger to confrontation.

MORT  
Get lost, punk.

BILLY BOGGS  
Or what?

The JERSEY BOYS step to. Mort holds them back.

MORT  
Or I'll rearrange your nose with my  
shoe and do the world a big favor.

BILLY BOGGS  
Strong words for a guy whose face  
looks like it caught on fire and  
was put out with a fork.

Mort advances, gritting his teeth.

MORT

Don't get smart with me, pal. I'll  
kick your ass so hard you'll have  
to unbutton your collar to shit.

BILLY BOGGS

"Get smart with you?" How would you  
know?

The JERSEY BOYS watch in awe as Mort and Billy square off.

Suddenly, both men crack a SMILE.

They LAUGH and push each other like brothers.

TOUGH JERSEY

(confused)

Yo. You cool, Mort?

MORT

I dunno, Billy. Am I cool?

Billy rolls his eyes.

BILLY BOGGS

We're good, guys. I'm a producer on  
the show.

Apathetic, they exit. Throwing his arm over Billy, Mort  
leads him through the backstage.

MORT

It did suck, didn't it?

BILLY BOGGS

Not totally. But it was too easy.  
Like a fight between Mike Tyson and  
a kid with polio.

Mort chuckles.

MORT

Fucking Libertarians. Who we got  
next week?

BILLY BOGGS

Depends.

MORT

On?

Billy gives him a look. Mort SIGHS.

BILLY BOGGS  
Look, I know you don't like her --

MORT  
I like her.

BILLY BOGGS  
-- but she's got some good ideas.  
You should hear her out. Seriously.

Mort stops. Eyes Billy.

MORT  
You rounding Rebecca's bases?

BILLY BOGGS  
No.

MORT  
C'mon.

BILLY BOGGS  
I work with the woman for Christ's  
sake, Mort. We're just friends.

MORT  
Friends who fuck.

BILLY BOGGS  
Just think about it, K?

Mort GRUNTS.

MORT  
We pick up any more sponsors?

BILLY BOGGS  
Some locals. Ma and pa stuff. But  
the Pizza Huts of the world will be  
knocking soon. Trust me.

Morton tussles Billy's hair. He does.

#### **INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

Not exactly a five star joint, the surroundings resemble the early stages of an Olive Garden family chain. And in every booth, a blue collar family trying to enjoy a night out.

CLOSE ON: a PASTA PLATE as it hovers over tables, balanced carefully in a WAITRESS' hand.

Weaving and dodging, finally it arrives in front of --

-- MORT and his FAMILY:

Consisting of JOAN, a mother on the razor's edge of 40 and proud of it, and their daughter KELLI, a 17-year-old who'd rather be anywhere else than here... with her family.

MORT  
Dig in, girls. Get it while it's  
hot.

Kelli grabs for the food, but thinks better when she sees her mother - hands clasped, eyes closed - praying.

She follows suit as Mort takes his own advice. Lumping food onto his plate, he lights up a cigarette and waits patiently.

Then --

JOAN  
(amen)  
Okay. Let's eat.

-- Kelli lunges at the food like a coiled up cobra.

Snorting smoke, Mort grins at Joan. Pointing up:

MORT  
You put in a good word for me?

JOAN  
Always do.

The two share a smile. Still smitten after all these years.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
You never told us how the show went  
today.

MORT  
It was fine.

JOAN  
Who did you have on?

MORT  
Nobody important. Some political  
activist.

JOAN  
Mort?

MORT  
Yeah, hon?

JOAN

Don't make me ask again.

He drops the bullshit. SIGHS.

MORT

It sucked, Joan. It just --

Joan CLEARS HER THROAT, gesturing to Kelli.

MORT (CONT'D)

(correcting)

-- wasn't very good. I don't know what I'm missing either, but lately something's just felt off about these last few shows. Like I'm...

JOAN

Reaching a wider audience?

MORT

No.

JOAN

Publicizing important issues?

MORT

Uh-uh.

JOAN

Making you more famous than ever?

Mort grins. He gets her point.

MORT

Plateauing is the world I was looking for.

JOAN

(eye roll)

Oh, don't be such a worrywart. Your show is not leveling off. People love you. And if they don't, even better. Because to hate you, they'll have to tune in just like everyone else.

Mort weighs her words in his head as Joan gives him a KISS.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's a win-win, sweetheart. Don't think about it too much.

Embarrassed, Mort cracks a smile. They share a laugh.

Noticeably silent, Mort now turns his attention to Kelli:

MORT  
How's the college hunt going,  
kiddo? Any of 'em you like?

KELLI  
A few.

MORT  
Probably the ones furthest away,  
huh?

Kelli rolls her eyes.

JOAN  
Leave her alone, Mort.

MORT  
What? If she wants to go to a  
California school, she can. All I'm  
sayin' is that there are plenty of  
great schools here in our own  
backyard.

KELLI  
(annoyed)  
I know that.

MORT  
Might not hurt to apply to 'em  
then. Probably have a better chance  
at getting in too now that you have  
a famous dad hanging around.

He gives her a NUDGE - trying to be cute.

But Kelli's not playing.

KELLI  
Yeah, I guess so.

MORT  
There ya go! See how much easier it  
is when you see things my way?

Kelli feigns a smile as Joan shoots Mort a look that seems to  
say *"we'll-talk-about-this-later."*

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

A PHOTO of Joan and Kelli is projected onto the curtain behind Mort. He gestures to it. Proud.

Talking to us:

MORT

My girls! The beautiful Joan. And Kelli, too. Gang, if I were ever given a mug that read "World's Greatest Dad," you could rest assured that I would have earned it. But, y'know what? They never gave me one of those stupid mugs.

An empathetic "AWW" from the dark of the crowd, the audience hidden from view.

MORT (CONT'D)

No. No. We can't blame them. It's really the mug's fault. That's a limiting title. What I needed was a mug that said "World's Greatest Entertainer!"

Hamming it up, the audience CLAPS and CHEERS.

MORT (CONT'D)

BUT! But. How does one earn that title? Sure, any yahoo with 99 cents could buy the cup. But how do you earn it?

BACK TO:

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - WWOR-TV STATION - MORNING**

And it's packed with PRODUCERS and BOOKERS. Their binders and breakfast snacks clutter the table.

PETE GOLDSMITH, a chubby bald man, continues:

GOLDSMITH

I got Curtis Swila, the Guardian Angel guy. Colonel Bo Gritz, the CIA-drugs guy. And Otto Van Ruggins.

BILLY BOGGS

Ruggins? How many times has he been on?

JIM LANGAN, a rosy-cheeked 50s, holds up FOUR FINGERS as he downs his third coffee.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
Drop him. What's the deal with the  
CIA-drugs guy?

GOLDSMITH  
Conspiracy. Tyranny. Normal stuff.

JIM LANGAN  
Could cut Swila and make that our  
whole show. Ring that Ollie North  
bell again.

Everyone ponders as a LOUD MOAN interrupts them.

Laying on a couch, Mort blows smoke out the open window.

MORT  
Look. We're not gonna get anywhere  
doing the same tricks, guys. This  
is a dog and pony show. Not reruns  
of Sanford and Son. We need  
thoroughbreds. Real fighters. No  
more duds. No more "normal stuff."  
Give me something hot.

He catches eyes with Billy, who nods toward --

-- REBECCA JOHNSON, 20s. A bespectacled blonde with worry  
wrinkles above her frames. She's got big ideas but little  
courage in sharing them.

Mort SIGHS.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Rebecca, honey, what do you got?

REBECCA  
(caught off guard)  
Oh - me? Well, I've got...

She shuffles through her papers.

REBECCA (CONT'D)  
Vic Basile from the Human Rights  
Campaign. Uh... Roy Innus. The  
National CORE Chairman. I also have  
Rob Sherman --

GOLDSMITH  
-- the American Atheists guy?

Rebecca NODS. Mort sits up, confused.

MORT

Okay, hold on. Who are these clowns?

Intimidated, Rebecca looks to Billy for help.

BILLY BOGGS

Homosexuality, racism, religion. They're something hot, Mort.

MORT

The topics are, sure. But how are these guys in the ring? I'm not beating another lame-o to death in the first round, am I?

REBECCA

Um...

(all eyes on her)

... Sherman is the one you want then. He's loud and obnoxious but gets his point across.

MORT

Loud and obnoxious, huh? So you're saying he's like me?

He stares her down. Rebecca freezes.

REBECCA

No... Oh, God. I -- I --

MORT

Rebecca?

REBECCA

Yes, sir?

MORT

I'm fuckin' with you, sweetheart.

Mort breaks into a CHUCKLE along with the rest of the staff.

Rebecca tries to play it off as she catches eyes with Billy. He gives her a WINK. She smiles to herself.

MORT (CONT'D)

Not bad, kiddo. If he's as good as you say he is, get him on the phone and book him for the Monday slot.

GOLDSMITH  
But don't we have Allred Monday?

MORT  
Bump her back. An atheist  
showdown'll make a bigger splash  
after Sunday Church and Monday  
Mass.

The PRODUCERS all nod. Mort's got a knack for this.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Has anyone seen the ratings from  
last Friday's show?

JIM LANGAN  
Yeah. I got 'em here. It was, uh...

He fumbles through some PAPERS before being cut off:

BILLY BOGGS  
2.5 over 11. We're up 3 points from  
last week.

MORT  
And rising?

BILLY BOGGS  
Steady as she goes.

Mort shifts uncomfortably. Not good enough.

**INT. MORT'S OFFICE - LATER**

Arms folded, Mort paces around his bare bones office as he  
stares at the --

TV SCREEN:

-- watching last Friday's "performance."

He pauses the VHS TAPE as Billy enters.

BILLY BOGGS  
You're doing it again.

MORT  
What?

BILLY BOGGS  
Obsessing.

Mort lights up a cigarette and points to the SCREEN.

MORT  
Come over here and look at this.

BILLY BOGGS  
Mort...

MORT  
C'mon. Look at this and tell me  
what you see.

Billy looks to the --

TV SCREEN:

-- to see an image of Mort and the ACTIVIST from earlier.

BILLY BOGGS  
I see two idiots on a stage.

MORT  
Dammit, I'm serious.

BILLY BOGGS  
What do you want me to say? Yeah,  
it was a mediocre show. But who  
cares? We're still beating out  
every other local spot on the East  
coast.

MORT  
Y'know what I see?

Billy's already tired of this game.

MORT (CONT'D)  
An opportunity to really do  
something big. Something that would  
excite people. Keep 'em talking.

BILLY BOGGS  
(mocking)  
Like what? KO your next guest in a  
grudge match?

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

A LIGHT BULB clicks on above Mort's head. Eureka! A BIG SMILE as he snorts out smoke. Leaving the audience LAUGHING.

BACK TO:

**MORT'S OFFICE - SAME AS ABOVE**

MORT

Not punch. But what if, when things get heated up, I give him a little slap? Nothing hard or anything. Just enough to get the crowd on my side. Y'know, rile 'em up.

Billy hesitates, confused. Did he hear that right?

MORT (CONT'D)

I know it sounds dramatic. But look at the WWF, I mean, that's what makes good TV nowadays --

BILLY BOGGS

*"Give him a little slap?"* No, Mort, it sounds like fucking assault. Christ, what's wrong with you?

Mort holds up his hands, calming Boggs.

MORT

Alright, alright. I take it back. It was just a joke, okay? A joke.

BILLY BOGGS

Was it?

Mort smiles that TOOTHY GRIN as he crashes back into his office chair... avoiding the question.

MORT

Your girl really came through today. I called around, that Sherman's a pit bull.

Billy lays on the couch - effectively taking off his "producer hat."

BILLY BOGGS

I told you so, didn't I? And she's NOT my girl.

MORT  
Sure seemed like it with all the  
googly-eyes you two were making.

Billy crumples up a PAPER and tosses it at Mort.

Both men laugh, almost a brotherly bond.

BILLY BOGGS  
How's Joan and Kelli? You guys  
doing anything fun tonight?

MORT  
Think I'm gonna pick up some Roy  
Rogers on the way home. Give 'em a  
nice surprise.

BILLY BOGGS  
And who says Mort the Mouth doesn't  
have a heart of gold, huh?

MORT  
24 carats, baby.

#### **EXT. ROY ROGERS RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

A 1987 CADILLAC idles in an almost empty parking lot. Behind the wheel, Mort rests with his eyes closed.

A mercurial SMIRK on his face.

Suddenly, a COWGIRL with a bright bandana, rosy cheeks and a BUTTON that reads "*Welcome to Roy Rogers*," lifts her head up from Mort's lap. She smiles, obviously a fan.

He WINKS, pushing her head back down.

#### **INT. MORT'S HOME - ENGLEWOOD, NJ - NIGHT**

Entering the house with a FAST FOOD BAG, Mort hollers out.

MORT  
I got takeout! Kelli, honey, it's  
your favorite!

Mort moves into the...

#### **KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

... and pulls out a CHICKEN LEG. Taking a bite:

MORT  
(playful)  
You gals better hurry! I worked up  
one helluva an appetite today.

But instead of the patter of feet, he hears... silence.

Confused, Mort moves down the hall.

**INT. KELLI'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Mort pokes his head in to find a clutter of CLOTHES and ROB  
LOWE PIN-UPS.

But no Kelli.

**EXT. BACK PORCH - NIGHT**

Sitting on the swing --

MORT (O.S.)  
Joan, baby, you home?

JOAN  
Out back!

-- Mort finds Joan, smoking.

MORT  
Where's...

JOAN  
She's staying at Heather's tonight.

Mort slides next to his wife. Bums her cigarette.

MORT  
How'd you pull that off,  
sacrificial lamb?

But she's not smiling. Feeling the tension:

MORT (CONT'D)  
What's wrong?

JOAN  
(troubled)  
Mort... We need to talk about  
what's been going on.

He stiffens up - nervous.

MORT  
What... What do you mean?

JOAN  
Kelli. You've been riding her too hard, honey.

Relieved, Mort relaxes a bit.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
I just worry that if you're not careful, you're going to end up pushing her away. I mean, what if she goes off to college and never wants to come back?

MORT  
That won't happen.

JOAN  
You don't know that.

MORT  
Yes. I do. Christ, it's not like I hit the girl or anything. I just want her to stay closer to home.

JOAN  
You mean closer to you.

MORT  
I mean closer to us.

Joan gently touches his cheek.

JOAN  
No. You don't. And that's fine. I know you love having her around, but you need to start thinking about what Kelli wants.

A SIGH.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Cheer up. As usual you're overlooking the silver lining.  
(off his puzzled look)  
We'll have the house *all* to ourselves.

She grins seductively as her hand moves toward his belt.

Catching up, Mort intercepts her grasp.

MORT

Oh. I like where this is going, but  
lemme hit the shower first. Meet me  
upstairs in 10?

JOAN

Make it 5.

Mort hops to, pulls off his shirt and rushes into the house.  
Leaving Joan in stitches.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

A somber tone. Mort addresses it:

MORT

I know what you're thinking. How  
could I do that to poor Joan? Cheat  
on her. Well, first off, fuck you  
for asking. It's none of your  
goddamn business. And second, good  
question. But I never cheated.  
Fucked around. Sure. Plenty. But  
cheated? That woman never wanted  
for anything while we were  
together.

Taking a drag from his cigarette.

MORT (CONT'D)

And I pride myself on that.

BACK TO:

**EXT. WWOR-TV STATION - DAY**

A line of FANATICS circle the building. And it's all Jersey.  
Muscle tees, greasy hair and leather, leather, leather.

All itching for some televised action.

Making her way through the parking lot, we find Rebecca  
headed to work. A few steps ahead, is Billy doing the same.  
She jogs to catch up.

REBECCA

Billy! Hey.

BILLY BOGGS  
Hey, Rebecca.

He points to the crowd.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
This is crazy, right? Gonna be a  
good show. You excited?

REBECCA  
Hey, listen. I just wanted to thank  
you for --

He waves her off.

BILLY BOGGS  
Forget it.

REBECCA  
No, really. I appreciate you  
putting in a good word for me. I  
know it's hard for someone of... my  
position to be taken seriously by  
Mr. Downey. So it means a lot.

He stops.

BILLY BOGGS  
What do you mean "your position?"

REBECCA  
Well... because I'm a woman.

Billy SCOFFS. Continues walking.

BILLY BOGGS  
He doesn't care that you're a  
woman. He cares that you're new.

REBECCA  
But what about his shows on  
feminism?

BILLY BOGGS  
It's a TV show, Rebecca. Emphasis  
on "show."

Rebecca goes red with embarrassment. Billy notices.

REBECCA  
God, I'm so stupid.

BILLY BOGGS  
Noooo. You're just gullible.

He playfully NUDGES her. She gestures to the CROWD:

REBECCA

Well, I hope nobody tells them  
that.

They share a laugh.

**INT. BACKSTAGE - WWOR-TV STATION - NIGHT**

We focus on a TOOTHY MOUTH as it CHEWS RARE, BLOODY STEAK.

Pull out to REVEAL -- Mort.

He chows down as Billy, Rebecca and Jim run through the show:

JIM LANGAN

We'll be starting with Sherman  
right out of the gate. He's hot off  
a court ruling in Illinois to take  
"God" out of the pledge of  
allegiance in public schools, so be  
prepared.

Mort rolls his eyes as he CHOMPS.

REBECCA

You'll have Robert Skolrood from  
the National Legal Foundation on  
your side in the first segment.  
Then we'll switch over to the  
Director of American Atheists in  
the second.

JIM LANGAN

But don't worry, because you're  
stacked after the mid-show break  
with Pastor Parker and Dr. Lee from  
Baptist Atlanta.

MORT

Not too stacked, though. I want a  
real shot at this guy.

BILLY BOGGS

You'll be floating alone for the  
first 20 minutes. Should give you  
plenty of time.

Mort nods to himself - psyched up. Another CHOMP.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

Just one thing to keep an eye on is our last segment with Sherman. We still don't have a good out for it, so maybe end it with a throw to the audience? Something from Skolrood?

MORT

Nah. I got somethin' better planned.

A worried look from everyone. Specifically Billy.

BILLY BOGGS

Like what?

MORT

Trust me.

BILLY BOGGS

It's not what I think it is, is it? Because you said you were just joking.

MORT

Jesus, Boggs. I said I got it. So - trust me - I got it. Okay?

Billy clams up. Fearful of what that might mean.

Mort turns to Langan:

MORT (CONT'D)

How's the beast looking today?

JIM LANGAN

Looking good, Mort.

MORT

(dead serious)

Jim. I asked you how the beast was looking.

Mort glares at him. It's penetrating.

JIM LANGAN

They're out for blood.

Mort SMILES as he takes another CHOMP, juice and blood running down his chin.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

Mort, now dressed in a TUX, stands behind a MUSIC STAND.

MORT

I always fancied myself as a musician. Much better than my father. He was just too... Fuck him. Because I! I was on the edge. I was on the pulse of what you people really wanted. And, let's face it, what you really wanted - was pure, unadulterated chaos.

CHEERS from the audience.

MORT (CONT'D)

But to conduct a symphony of chaos, you need someone with vision. Someone with taste. Someone. With balls.

Mort raises up his hands like a composer. His cigarette in one hand. A conductor's BATON in the other.

And as he brings them down we --

CUT TO:

**BLACK**

As a CLASSIC TUNE -- the SABRE DANCE kicks in.

A pounding mix of DRUMS, HORNS and staccato VIOLINS.

The kind of music that a performing bear would use.

FADE IN:

**INT. PACKED STUDIO - NIGHT**

The BEAST, known to most as the rowdy AUDIENCE, "HOOTS" and "HOLLERS" in **SLOW-MO** as Mort, face red from yelling, argues with ROB SHERMAN, the atheist activist.

Inches from each other's faces, they huff and puff.

All drowned out by the CLASSIC TUNE. All in **SLOW-MOTION**.

MONTAGE:

- 1) A GUEST screams from the PODIUM in the crowd. Mort NODS in agreement.
- 2) ANOTHER GUEST screams from the podium. Mort screams back.
- 3) SHERMAN waves a DOCUMENT at the audience. A smug look.
- 4) Mort TEARS IT UP. The crowd goes nuts!
- 5) Focus on select members of the "beast." Gritting their teeth, punching the air, going absolutely insane.

END MONTAGE:

As - still in **SLOW-MO** - Mort looks offstage to Billy.

A telling SMIRK.

Worry written on his face, Billy shoves his clipboard onto Jim as he lunges toward the stage.

But it's too late, as Mort's HAND is already flying.

Destination - Sherman's face.

Suddenly, SLAP!

The CLASSIC TUNE drops and everything **SPEEDS UP TO NORMAL**.

We can hear the audience now. It's deafening.

MORT

-- And how about we baptise the  
creep?!

Mort empties his COFFEE CUP onto Sherman right before Billy jumps in between the two, keeping a pissed off atheist at bay.

This isn't a TV show. It's fight night.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

A chorus of "BRAVOS" and "HURRAHS" ring out from the dark as ROSES litter the stage below Mort's feet. He bows. Proud.

BACK TO:

**INT. BACKSTAGE - WWOR-TV STATION - NIGHT**

The PRODUCERS and BOOKERS all congregate in the hallway. Some slump against the wall, some pace up and down. Everyone is tense, concerned.

But none more so than Billy. Furious, he vents:

BILLY BOGGS

Is he fucking retarded?! Seriously, I want to know. Because if I need to have his head examined, I'll do it with a goddamn ball-pein hammer.

He KICKS a fold out chair. Hard.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

FUCK!

Pete Goldsmith PATS him on the back.

GOLDSMITH

Billy. It'll be alright.

BILLY BOGGS

He slapped a guest, Pete! Overlooking the fact that we'll be staring down a lawsuit tomorrow morning, how do you expect us to book any more guests?! Not to mention THIS fucking "gem!"

He holds up a crumpled LETTER.

JIM LANGAN

It's just a meeting. We don't necessarily know if it's good or bad.

BILLY BOGGS

(sarcastic)

Yeah. "Just a meeting" with the head of programming that we get right-the-fuck-after Mort pulls this little stunt. C'mon, Jim.

REBECCA

You think they're going to cancel us?

Silence. Everyone's worst fear. Suddenly, Mort enters.

Still energized by the crowd, he's pumped and all smiles.

MORT

God dammit, we really rocked it tonight, fellas. I sure don't pity the 10 o'clock news having to follow that, am I right?

No response. He notices the tension.

MORT (CONT'D)

What the hell's wrong with you clowns? We just had one of our best shows and you're all back here moping.

Billy steps to Mort - fire in his eyes.

BILLY BOGGS

I'm glad you liked it. Because it may have just been our last.

He shoves the LETTER onto Mort as he walks past.

The rest of the crew follows suit, exiting past Mort with disappointed looks and glares.

MORT

Guys, come on.

But it's too late. Left alone, Mort opens up the LETTER.

His shoulders fall as he reads, real worry setting in.

#### **INT. MORT'S HOME - LATE NIGHT**

Mort enters to find Joan and Kelli gathered around the TV watching --

ON SCREEN:

-- DAVID LETTERMAN and a young COMIC (Chris Elliot), who's gone out of his way to mock/mimic Mort. Including his wardrobe and a hilariously excessive amount of facial warts.

The girls GIGGLE at the parody as Joan WAVES Mort over.

JOAN

Honey, this is incredible! They're doing YOU on Letterman!

Mort takes it in - unfazed.

KELLI

Like looking into a mirror. Huh,  
Dad?

An easy jab. Mort lets it land and exits down the hallway.

Worried, Joan follows.

**BEDROOM - LATER**

On the side of the bed, Mort drags on his cigarette.

Slow. Long. Deep in thought. Enter Joan, consoling:

JOAN

It's just a joke, Mort. Imitation  
is the greatest form of flattery.  
And besides, it's Letterman! I  
mean, that's huge, isn't it?

Mort doesn't blink. Locked in himself.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Honey? Are you okay?

She sits next to him, holding his hand.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Babe, what's wrong? Tell me.

MORT

You didn't see the show tonight,  
did you?

JOAN

No. What happened?

MORT

I just... wanted to make an  
impression. Do something different  
than all the other shows, y'know?

JOAN

(strict)

Mort. What did you do?

He looks to her. A little scared. A little confused.

MORT

I fucked up big time.

Mort collapses into his hands.

Joan caresses his head, overwrought with questions that'll have to wait till morning.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

ROSES ALL GONE, Mort stares off into space.

MORT

But how big? I was literally going to meet my maker. The one person who could pull the plug on me and my empire before I could even build it.

Takes a drag.

MORT (CONT'D)

I'm not afraid of telling you, gang, that I was scared. Terrified. I mean, maybe Billy was right. Maybe I did go too far...

BACK TO:

**INT. LOBBY - MCA CORPORATE OFFICES - NEW YORK, NY - DAY**

Dressed in his usual snappy attire, Mort sits quietly like a boy waiting outside the principal's office.

Across from him, we find Billy constantly adjusting his stuffy suit.

The two avoid eye contact with one another until:

MORT

(re: suit)

That new?

BILLY BOGGS

Shut up.

MORT

Looks good.

Billy SIGHS. Mort leans in, earnest:

MORT (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

About to respond, Billy stops himself. What's the point?

MORT (CONT'D)  
Bill... I'm sorry.

Annoyed, but genuinely receptive, all he can muster is a simple NOD that says "forgiven but not forgotten."

Suddenly, an ASSISTANT enters:

ASSISTANT  
Mr. Downey? Mr. Boggs?

**INT. BOB PITTMAN'S OFFICE - DAY**

The very definition of "executive." Black art deco furniture, chrome, floor to ceiling windows.

Ushered inside, Mort and Billy are guided to two leather chairs.

ASSISTANT  
Mr. Pittman will be right with you.

She exits. Mort and Billy exchange an uneasy glance as --

REVERSE ANGLE:

-- we see that they're sitting right in front of BOB PITTMAN.

A petite but fit man in his 40s dwarfed by his ostentatious desk, Pittman ignores their presence. He's reading the paper. Totally engrossed. Finally:

PITTMAN  
My staff tells me you were on  
Letterman. How'd it go?

Mort looks to Billy, unsure.

MORT  
It was a sketch. A parody. I wasn't  
actually on.

BILLY BOGGS  
But no publicity is bad publicity,  
right?

Pittman drops the paper.

They suddenly have his full attention, and it's intimidating.

PITTMAN

I hope it wasn't too much trouble for you both to come into the city, but I'm sure you understand that this is the kind of thing I prefer to do in person. Reminds people of the pecking order.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

A lone SPOT LIGHT on Mort as he grovels on his knees:

MORT

Are you there, God? It's me, Mort.

BACK TO:

**BOB PITTMAN'S OFFICE - SAME AS ABOVE**

PITTMAN

What generation would you say you belonged to, Mr. Boggs?

BILLY BOGGS

Uh... I don't know. Generation X?

PITTMAN

And you, Mort?

MORT

I'm well into my fifties, so I guess the Silent Generation.

Pittman smirks to himself.

PITTMAN

Well, that puts me smack dab in the middle, doesn't it? You see, I'm a baby boomer. I grew up in the 1960s. A tumultuous decade for this country. You had blacks and whites slugging it out on the news. A dead president. Vietnam. It was like America was coming of age all over again. Hitting puberty. Trying to find its voice among all the crackpots and curmudgeons. And if you can, do you remember the voice that they found?

Confused, Mort and Billy both shrug.

PITTMAN (CONT'D)

Television. An international, ecumenical voice to everyone from the blue eyes down to the brown. An affordable square box that tells you what to buy, eat, think, and all it asks for in return is your loyal, undivided attention. Attention. You know, that little focus of energy you put into folding the socks or tying your shoe. THAT is the currency of today. THAT is the maker of kings in this industry. And after last night, you Mr. Downey, have just become royalty.

Stunned. Come again?

PITTMAN (CONT'D)

We'll be taking your show national next week. Which means this coming Monday, you'll command the attention of 76 million households. Does that sound to your liking?

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

Suddenly the back curtains open to REVEAL --

MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR

*"Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah-  
Hallelujah-Hallelujah!"*

-- a FULL FIVE SET CHOIR with an ACCOMPANYING ORCHESTRA!

Mort stands, exuberant.

MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR (CONT'D)

*"And he shall reign forever and  
eeeeever! King of Kings! Lord of  
Lords!"*

Mort basks in this miracle, hands out-stretched - receiving the very word of God himself. The CHOIR continues over...

BACK TO:

**BOB PITTMAN'S OFFICE - SAME AS ABOVE**

... as all Mort can do is GRIN. WIDE. Like really wide.  
But Billy is still shell-shocked.

**INT. WHITE HORSE TAVERN - NEW YORK, NY - DAY**

Balancing a PITCHER and a basket of FRIES, Mort makes his way back to Billy and their table. His enthusiasm running high:

MORT

Hot fries, cold beer and the  
Goddamn keys to the castle! Fuck.  
We're running hot, Billy-boy.

BILLY BOGGS

Yeah... I still can't believe it.

MORT

Well, try. 'Cause this is gonna be  
big for us. Pizza Hut big.

Billy finally cracks a SMILE. Drinks.

MORT (CONT'D)

Shit. With 76 million households  
watching? I'm gonna be a  
motherfuckin' rock star. Me. At 55.

He laughs.

BILLY BOGGS

Nah. You don't got the style. You  
need an earring, a tan and a hit  
record.

MORT

Fuck you.

BILLY BOGGS

Fuck you. You're not a rock star,  
Mort.

(leaning in)

You're an American prophet. The  
frustrated and beleaguered voice of  
the people. The true to life Howard  
Beale. THAT's what you are.

There's that GRIN again. Mort PATS Billy's shoulder.

MORT

Atta boy! I was wondering when you were going to start celebrating. And that's fuckin' brilliant. I like the sound of that. --

BILLY BOGGS

Listen, Mort...

MORT

-- the American Prophet. Get ready for an evangel you won't forget, America!

He laughs more, tickled pink by the new moniker.

BILLY BOGGS

... I don't know if I can stay on with you as this picks up steam.

MORT

(flippant)

What? Zip it, Bill. You're staying.

BILLY BOGGS

I'm serious, Mort. I don't feel like this is going to work out.

He's got Mort's attention now.

MORT

Why are you telling me this? We're going national. NA-TION-AL. And you don't wanna be a part of that? Fuck off, Boggs, I need you.

BILLY BOGGS

It's not the show I don't want to be a part of. It's this.

He gestures between himself and Mort.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

We've been slugging it out for months to get what we just got today, Mort. But you lied to me before you went on with Sherman. And I can't produce a show where even I don't know what's going to happen from night to night. Sure. It all worked out. But if I can't count on you...

Mort takes this in. SIGHS.

MORT

You're right. I went off script because I thought it would help the show. Help us. But if that means breaking your trust, Billy, then I don't have any qualms tellin' you I'll never do it again. You got my word on that.

BILLY BOGGS

(not buying it)

Mort...

MORT

No, no, no. I'm serious. You've been a rock for me and the last thing I want to do is jeopardize what we got. When I get a big chest, you pop it. When I spout bullshit, you call me on it. I need you, Boggs. And you know I'm not just talking out of my ass when I say it.

Billy smiles. Thinks about it.

BILLY BOGGS

Fine. But you have to promise --

MORT

Never again. I swear. And if you think I'm getting out of line, kidney punch me into submission.

They share a LAUGH and a drink. A mended friendship.

BILLY BOGGS

So. What's our first national show about, boss?

MORT

I dunno. But whatever it is has gotta be big enough to get 76 million homes to tune in.

CUT TO:

#### TV NEWS FOOTAGE

As IMAGES of a BLACK TEENAGE GIRL fly by.

NEWS ANCHOR

*"... The sixteen-year-old cheerleader said she had been abducted four days earlier and had been raped and sodomized by who she claimed were four white assailants. One of whom she suspected of being a police officer."*

Now, HARSHER IMAGES. Crime scene photos of the GIRL.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

*"In addition to being found unconscious and wrapped in plastic, Tawana Brawley was also found with racial slurs written on her torso and dog feces smeared on her body."*

Now, B-ROLL of a young, fat, black reverend at a rally, screaming through a MEGAPHONE. This is AL SHARPTON.

AL SHARPTON

*"We're gonna expose the facts in these crimes and we're not gonna let this girl become another scapegoat of a corrupt system!"*

PULL OUT to REVEAL --

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - WWOR-TV STATION - DAY**

-- as Mort, Billy and the whole STAFF are glued to the TV.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

*"Acting as spokesperson for the Brawley family, is social advocate Reverend Al Sharpton" --*

Mort MUTES the tube.

MORT

Where are we at with this, guys?

REBECCA

We have her lawyers locked in for Wednesday's appearance. Alton Maddox and Vernon Mason.

GOLDSMITH

Stack that with some law enforcement reps from the city and we've got one helluva show.

MORT

What about the fat guy?

Mort points at AL SHARPTON on the TV.

JIM LANGAN

Sharpton? He's more of a church organizer. I doubt he'll have anything to say on the case besides fiery rhetoric and race-baiting.

Mort can't take his eyes of Sharpton. Almost admiring.

MORT

No. That's exactly who we need. Get 'im.

JIM LANGAN

But he's just an opportunist. Giving him another podium to beat on is only going to make us look like we're using this tragedy as a soundbite.

MORT

This story has everyone talking, Jim. We're not taking advantage. We're creating a public forum.  
(looking to)  
Billy?

BILLY BOGGS

Jim's right. He's high risk. But he's also high reward. I mean, this guy is THE FACE of the conversation. So, I say we get him and reign him in if we need to.

Rebecca and Pete nod in agreement.

MORT

Do it.

Billy exits the room as Jim shakes his head - not sold.

UN-MUTING the TV, Mort cranks the volume as --

ON SCREEN:

-- Rev. Sharpton huffs and puffs over a crowd:

AL SHARPTON

*"We gonna show the nation just how  
low-down and callous the state of  
New York is!"*

"AMEN!" echoes back from his followers.

MORT (PRE-LAP)

God, he was beautiful. What a  
master. The whole world wrapped  
around his fuckin' finger...

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

Desperate, Mort clenches his fists.

MORT

... I wanted that. The seduction.  
The excitement. Sure. When I  
talked, people listened. I was  
good. I was great. But he was  
better. He even had a nickname.

(presenting)

The talking microwave. Because he  
could heat anything up. And fuck-  
all if ol' Al didn't pick the  
perfect scandal, too.

Mort SLAPS his hands together - excited.

MORT (CONT'D)

I mean, the Tawana Brawley case had  
it all. Rape. Race. Cops. Cover-up.  
People were out for blood and he  
was gonna give it to them. So...  
naturally, I provided the arena.

A giddy SMILE.

**EXT. WWOR-TV STATION - NIGHT**

A BIG CROWD lines the building. Some FANS. Some PROTESTORS.  
A mix of black and white, all here for the show.

SIGNS of support and anger pepper the crowd:

*"Tawana was RAPED!"    "WE STAND WITH AL!"    "Fuck the police!"*

A gasoline atmosphere waiting for a light.

**INT. BACKSTAGE - WWOR-TV STATION - NIGHT**

The hustle and bustle of television in the making as PAs and STAGEHANDS run around like ER doctors. It's almost showtime.

We follow Billy as he cuts through the chaos into --

**BILLY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

-- to see Rebecca waiting for him.

BILLY BOGGS  
There she is.

REBECCA  
Here I am.

BILLY BOGGS  
Did you get it?

REBECCA  
Got it. And with the promos running non-stop, I think we're looking at record numbers.

She hands Billy a SPREAD-SHEET. He scans it.

BILLY BOGGS  
Whoa. Think tonight's the night?

REBECCA  
Hit the bench, Carson - there's a new late night king in town.

They share a SNICKER. Billy checks his watch.

BILLY BOGGS  
Sharpton in yet?

REBECCA  
Make-up. Getting his hair done.

BILLY BOGGS  
And Mort?

She gives him a look. Billy SIGHS - knowing all too well what comes next.

Skin-on-skin SLAPPING PRE-LAPS over --

**INT. MORT'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT**

-- as a young JERSEY CHICK with teased hair and a VARSITY JACKET takes Mort's vicious thrusts.

This isn't sex. It's fucking. Hard and angry.

Cigarette hanging from his lip, Mort looks to a FRAMED PHOTO of his family, bumping around on the desk.

He catches his reflection in the glass. SMILES to himself.

Then - KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

BILLY BOGGS (O.S.)  
Mort, you in there?

MORT  
Gimme a sec!

BILLY BOGGS (O.S.)  
Hurry up. We're on in 10.

He thrusts faster.

**INT. BACKSTAGE - 3 MINUTES LATER**

Billy waits by the DRESSING ROOM DOOR as it suddenly opens.

Mort steps out, tucking his shirt back into his pants.

He and Billy walk and talk:

MORT  
How's the beast lookin'?

BILLY BOGGS  
(annoyed)  
Impatient.

MORT  
Them or you?

BILLY BOGGS  
Both.

Picking up on the tension:

MORT  
Y'know before the Romans would go  
into battle, they'd have large  
orgies to boost their testosterone.

BILLY BOGGS

That so?

Mort NODS. Lights up.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

Well Joan's here, Caligula, so keep it in your pants till you get home.

Mort LAUGHS.

MORT

Anything last minute?

BILLY BOGGS

State Attorney Bob Abrams is conducting a grand jury on the Brawley case. Starts this week.

MORT

And Sharpton?

They walk past the CRAFT TABLE --

BILLY BOGGS

Still not cooperating. He and the lawyers want a special prosecutor.

MORT

So they don't trust Abrams 'cause he's part of the establishment?

-- past the GRIP EQUIPMENT --

BILLY BOGGS

They don't trust Abrams 'cause he's white.

MORT

(admiring)

Jesus. This guy's gold.

BILLY BOGGS

Platinum. Just look at these projected figures for tonight.

(waving a SPREAD-SHEET)

I mean, if we hit anywhere close to these numbers? Every major sponsor is going to want a piece of us.

-- down a narrow walk way --

MORT

Even Pizza Hut?

BILLY BOGGS  
(smiling)  
Especially Pizza Hut.

-- and they spit out into the --

**INT. PACKED STUDIO - CONTINUOUS**

-- as the DRUMS kick in. The opening music.

The FANS SCREAM and SHOUT as their favorite gladiator enters.

Billy breaks away as Mort HIGH FIVES the crowd.

Spotting Joan, Mort gives her a KISS, and then he's up --

-- ON STAGE.

He raises his hands to quiet the audience. And among them, Mort notices the JERSEY CHICK he was just "in."

A sly smile corners his mouth as - to CAMERA:

MORT  
Social unrest, violent racism and a  
horrific rape have rocked the  
nation, folks. And tonight, we're  
going to talk about it with a man  
who's praised by some as the new  
civil rights leader of the '90s. --

CUT TO:

**LATER**

As a chubby AL SHARPTON drowns out a SKINNY YUPPIE.

It's a shouting match ON STAGE. And Al is winning:

AL SHARPTON  
"Why are we so angry?" A black girl  
was RAPED by white cops and YOU  
have the ignorance to ask "Why are  
WE so angry?!" Well, I'll tell you  
why - it's because crackers DIDN'T  
CHOOSE US!

A roar of CHEERS from the crowd. "AMEN!"

Idolizing the fervor, Mort simply watches as --

SKINNY YUPPIE  
Hold on! Let me finish --

AL SHARPTON  
You ARE finished! This whole  
justice system is finished!  
And we're not gonna sit back  
and let them perpetrate these  
crimes on black people...

-- suddenly the AUDIO FADES OUT, replaced by a familiar rap  
song: "MAMA SAID KNOCK YOU OUT" by:

LL COOL J (V.O.)  
"Don't call it a comeback...  
I been here for years...  
Rockin' my peers and puttin'  
suckas' in fear...  
Makin' the tears rain down like a  
MON-soon...  
Listen to the bass go BOOM!"

And it's all in Mort's head as he studies Sharpton.

Whipping up the CROWD. Establishing dominance.

This guy's a fucking sorcerer.

LL COOL J (V.O.)  
"I'm gonna knock you out. HUUUH!  
Mama said knock you out. HUUUH!"

#### **INT. SHARPTON'S DRESSING ROOM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT**

Ecstatic, Mort enters only to become flanked by two BLACK  
BODYGUARDS. They eye him.

Mort pushes past, rounding the corner to SEE --

MORT  
Reverend! That. Was. Amazing.

-- REV. AL SHARPTON sitting in front of a VANITY MIRROR.

TWO WOMAN fuss over his hair and makeup as he sits with his  
eyes closed. Sweating profusely.

MORT (CONT'D)  
You fuckin' slayed 'em! Palm of  
your hand, Al, I swear.

AL SHARPTON  
(eyes still closed)  
Brother Mort. Do you know what an  
Abchanchu is?

MORT

A what?

AL SHARPTON

Tiffany. Rohandra.

(to GUARDS)

Y'all give us a minute?

The TWO WOMEN exit along with the BODYGUARDS, leaving Al alone with Mort.

AL SHARPTON (CONT'D)

Growing up in Brownsville,  
Brooklyn, I was surrounded by  
Bolivians. The old country ones.  
Full of spirits and superstitions.  
That's where the Abchanchu comes  
from. It's a shapeshifting succubus  
that feeds off hate and evil.

MORT

Ab-chan-chu, huh?

Sharpton NODS. Mort lights up.

MORT (CONT'D)

You calling me a vampire?

AL SHARPTON

I ain't calling you anything you  
already ain't. But the difference,  
Brother Mort, is that you take it  
as an unfavorable title. Whereas  
the Bolivians thought of the  
Abchanchu to be a protector. A  
saint of the downtrodden.

MORT

Ah... So, is that what you are?

Sharpton steals Mort's cigarette. Drags on it.

AL SHARPTON

No. I'm just a fuckin' vampire.

They share a LAUGH.

AL SHARPTON (CONT'D)

Hell. This Tawana Brawely situation  
is great exposure for me. For the  
black community. And, if you play  
your cards right, for you too. I  
mean, look, I kill for my people.

(MORE)

AL SHARPTON (CONT'D)  
I'm motherfuckin' Blackula for MY  
people. But who's the voice of YOUR  
flock, Mort? Who's their Abchanchu?

Mort SMILES.

MORT  
Takes one to know one, I guess.

Sharpton SMILES back. They SLAP HANDS.

AL SHARPTON  
My nigga.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

As the graduation song, *POMP & CIRCUMSTANCE*, plays. A  
disembodied VOICE takes us back to a familiar ceremony:

VOICE (O.S.)  
Morton Downey Jr. Television and  
Broadcasting Arts.

Suddenly, Mort enters in full CAP and GOWN. DEGREE in hand.

CLAPS echo from the dark of the audience.

Moving his TASSEL to the left, Mort speaks to us:

MORT  
It was a crash course in  
opportunity by the best professor  
around. And I just graduated with  
honors. He was so right. You folks  
didn't want to hear about the  
issues. You wanted ME to shape 'em  
for you. Packaged into one-hour  
soapbox sermons every night at 9pm  
eastern. A televised cage-match  
between good and evil. Right and  
wrong. Black and white. THAT'S the  
kind of entertainment you fine  
people deserved. So... For the  
hundreds in attendance and the  
millions watching at home, ladies  
and gentleman...

Mort RIPS OFF the graduation gown to REVEAL --

-- a TUXEDO. A HANGING-MIC lowers as he grabs it:

MORT (CONT'D)  
(boxing announcer)  
... Let's get ready to RUMBLE!

BACK TO:

The ROCKY SONG - "GONNA FLY NOW" - as it plays over...

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - WWOR-TV STATION - DAY**

And it's packed with STAFF. Billy, Rebecca, everyone.

All eyes on MORT as he continues with high energy:

MORT  
-- I'm talkin' nationwide. Like a  
tour. We hit Atlantic City. The  
Apollo. And then spread out west.

BILLY BOGGS  
(on board)  
We could book the TLA in Philly.  
The Fox Theatre in Georgia.

JIM LANGAN  
But if we're taking the show on the  
road, what's the issue? What's the  
topic?

Mort SMILES.

MORT  
Whatever we want it to be.

A hesitant silence, until:

REBECCA  
(unsure)  
Racism in America?

MORT  
You got it.

GOLDSMITH  
Smoker's rights?

MORT  
Hell yes!

JIM LANGAN  
(shrugging it off)  
The Tawana Brawley case again?

Mort points to Jim.

MORT

Definitely. Gotta have Sharpton  
back on. The doors are open, gang.  
Question is, are we gonna walk  
through? Or lock the deadbolt?

The STAFF smile. Excited about the possibilities.

JUMP CUT TO:

**LATER (ROCKY SONG CONT'D)**

And the room is ABUZZ. Like a Wall Street trading floor.

PRODUCERS and BOOKERS talk over one another.

Making plans, scheduling dates, calling locations.

It's a madhouse. And everyone's a patient.

**INT. MORT'S HOME - DAY**

The STRUM of a guitar echoes throughout the house.

Following the melody to its source --

-- it's Mort like we've never seen him before.

Barefoot, legs folded and holding an acoustic like a lover.

He SINGS:

MORT

*"You made me love you...  
I didn't want to do it - I didn't  
want to do it.  
You made me want you...  
And all the time you knew it - I  
guess you always knew it.*

A wannabe crooner, he can carry a tune. But barely.

Suddenly, Joan enters with a hesitant Kelli.

MORT (CONT'D)

*"You made me happy, sometimes.  
Sometimes, you made me glad." --*

He points to Joan.

JOAN  
*"Buuut there were times, dear.  
You made me feel sooooo bad."*

An off-key performance sends her and Mort into laughter.

He CLAPS. She takes a bow. Kelli rolls her eyes.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Isn't that one of your dad's old songs?

MORT  
(yes)  
Uh - Maybe.

JOAN  
You should sing it more often. Show off a little more of where you get your talents from.

Soured at the suggestion, Mort sets down the Guitar.

MORT  
So, what are my gals up to today?  
Doesn't Kelli have school?

JOAN  
Yes. But we're celebrating.

MORT  
Oh! Well, don't leave me hangin'.

Joan nudges Kelli forward. "Tell him."

KELLI  
I got accepted into Stanford.

Standing:

MORT  
That's great, honey. So this is the California one, huh?

Kelli stares daggers. Turns to her mom.

KELLI  
See, I told you he'd do this.

MORT  
Do what? I just asked a question.

Joan tries to calm her daughter.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Did you get into any other  
colleges?

JOAN  
(scolding)  
Mort!

MORT  
What?! I didn't say anything.

Kelly exits the room in a huff.

Joan reaches out to her, but thinks better of it.

JOAN  
(to Mort)  
What's got into your head that you  
can't even be happy for your own  
daughter, Mort?

MORT  
I AM happy. It's great that she got  
in. But we're not honestly gonna  
cart her off to some liberal arts  
school so she can throw away her  
education, are we?

JOAN  
That's not your decision to make.  
Or mine.

MORT  
Look. I don't know where this is  
coming from - but with the tour  
dates and everything - I don't have  
time for it. I thought we were on  
the same team here?

JOAN  
A team shows up for practice,  
sweetheart.

MORT  
What the hell does that mean?

JOAN  
It means... have fun on your trip.  
I bet the ratings will be amazing.

She moves to exit.

MORT  
Joan, wait.

She does.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Did you really like my singing?

**INT. LIMO - DRIVING - NIGHT**

In the back seat - mere inches away from each other - Billy and Rebecca shift through their respective SHOW BINDERS.

BILLY BOGGS  
So once we wrap in Harlem, we'll cross over to Philly and check-in. Mort'll be staying at the Four Seasons and the rest of us will be at the Omni Park.

REBECCA  
The "Omni?" Where's that, on Chestnut?

BILLY BOGGS  
Yeah.

REBECCA  
Why don't we move the staff into the Penn's View? It's closer, nicer and...

Billy leans in - "spill it."

REBECCA (CONT'D)  
They have a free mini-bar.

The two share a SMILE.

BILLY BOGGS  
I didn't know you'd been to Philly before?

REBECCA  
Lived there for a year pulling switch board at KYW 1060.

BILLY BOGGS  
Oh, man. I used to have their jingle stuck in my head for days.

REBECCA  
You still remember it?

Billy's eyes light up.

BILLY BOGGS

Do you?

And almost simultaneously:

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
 "KAY - WHY - DOUBLE U...  
 NEWS RADIO...  
 TEN SIXTEEEEEEE!!!"  
 (announcer voice)  
 All News. All the time.

REBECCA  
 "KAY - WHY - DOUBLE U...  
 NEWS RADIO...  
 TEN SIXTEEEEEEE!!!"  
 (announcer voice)  
 All News. All the time.

They both LAUGH.

REBECCA  
 I worked the night crew. So it was  
 that EVERY 15 minutes. I even timed  
 it so I could take little naps in-  
 between!

BILLY BOGGS  
 (impressed)  
 Never knew I was working with a  
 Philly girl this whole time.

REBECCA  
 I'm not a Philly girl.

BILLY BOGGS  
 No? What was your favorite bar  
 there?

REBECCA  
 Dirty Franks.

BILLY BOGGS  
 Dirty Franks.

She blushes.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
 Great IPA.

REBECCA  
 The BEST IPA.

A bond forming between them.

BILLY BOGGS  
 Maybe once the show's over you and  
 I could grab one?

REBECCA  
 I'd like that.

Suddenly, the door opens and --

-- MORT steps inside. Killing the mood.

Billy and Rebecca shuffle around to make room for him and --

BILLY BOGGS  
Hey, Mort. Ready to kick things  
off?

-- his GUITAR CASE.

MORT  
Hell yeah. Let's do it.

Both Billy and Rebecca look to the case, confused.

"MORT! MORT! MORT!" PRE-LAPS over...

# **A SERIES OF SHOTS:**

... as the song "*BLUE COLLAR KING*" leads the montage:

**SUPERIMPOSE: APOLLO THEATER. HARLEM, NY.**

1) The AUDIENCE explodes with energy as Mort walks in.

*BLUE COLLAR KING (V.O.)*  
*"There's a brand new name that's*  
*sweepin' cross America...*  
*MORTON DOWNEY JR!*  
*And talkin' is his game..."*

2) On stage, Mort yells at a GUEST. Gets in his face.

3) Now AL SHARPTON is on stage. A shoving match breaks out!

*BLUE COLLAR KING (V.O.)*  
*He's rude and crude...*  
*polite and nice...*  
*Says just what he thinks...*

4) Security swamps the stage. The crowd is loving it. And so are the CAMERAS.

*BLUE COLLAR KING (V.O.)*  
*But there's Oprah, Phil and Johnny.*  
*And he puts them all to shame..."*

**SUPERIMPOSE: TLA THEATER. PHILLY, PA.**

1) Another city. Another fanatical CROWD!

2) Mort grins as he address his audience. Drinking it in.

*BLUE COLLAR KING (V.O.)*

*(chorus)*

*"Well, he's the pitbull of the  
airwaves, the piranha of TV!  
Sayin' any-damn-thing he wants,  
from sea to shining sea..."*

3) An AUDIENCE SKINHEAD yells at a GUEST. Mort shouts him down!

4) AN AUDIENCE WOMAN gives Mort a kiss. He kisses back.

*BLUE COLLAR KING (V.O.)*

*(chorus)*

*"You love him or you hate him - oh -  
there ain't no in-between!  
From miles around they come in  
droves. Rich & poor, young & old! --*

4) AMERICAN FLAG draped over Mort, he signs hundreds of autographs from hundreds of FANS.

*BLUE COLLAR KING (V.O.)*

*-- To see America's new hero - the  
blue collar king!"*

5) INSERT OVER MORT: A RATINGS BAR that just keeps climbing and climbing and climbing and...

Finally,

6) We see Billy and Rebecca, at what we can only assume is **DIRTY FRANK'S BAR**, sharing a drink. All blushes and smiles.

**END MONTAGE.**

**INT. EMPTY THEATER - DAY**

And the stage is set for the Morton Downey Jr. Show. The LOUDMOUTH PODIUMS, the set CHAIRS, the cameras.

The stillness is eerie as a familiar STRUM echoes.

We follow it to find --

**SUPERIMPOSE: SHOWBOAT HOTEL + CASINO. ATLANTIC CITY, NJ.**

-- Mort, guitar in hand, continuing to sing the VERY SAME SONG AS ABOVE - except now it's just the acoustic version:

MORT

*"Well I know he's sympathetic to the homeless... But there's those who think that any kind of work is a sin... Why don't you get a job, just like everybody else... Instead of blaming others for the mess you're in..."*

He stops. Changes key:

MORT (CONT'D)

*"Instead of blaming others for the mess you're in..."*

He stops again - comparing. Suddenly, a VOICE from behind:

FEMALE VOICE (O.C.)

You had it right the first time.

Mort turns to see --

-- a late 20s blonde in daisy dukes and a Tee. With the body of a dancer and the makeup of a showgirl, she exudes the sex appeal and confidence of a movie star. This is LORI KREBS.

And she immediately has Mort's attention.

MORT

You really think so?

LORI

Yeah. I mean, besides the subject matter, it sounded pretty good.

MORT

Subject matter?

LORI

Don't get me wrong. I listen to a bunch of stuff. I love music. It's just -- I don't think I've ever heard a song about lazy homeless people before.

Mort LAUGHS.

LORI (CONT'D)

What's it called, the song?

MORT

"The Blue Collar King."

LORI  
Oh. So is that you?

Mort gives her an odd look. Is she serious?

LORI (CONT'D)  
What?

MORT  
You don't know who I am?

Lori takes in the set. The cameras. His guitar.

LORI  
Are you a singer?

Mort SMILES BIG.

MORT  
Something like that. Have you ever  
heard of the Morton Downey Jr.  
Show?

LORI  
I don't think so.  
(re: CAMERAS & SET)  
Is that what this is? A TV show?

He NODS.

LORI (CONT'D)  
You're totally Morton Downey Jr.,  
aren't you?

He NODS again. Her face goes red.

LORI (CONT'D)  
Oh my God! I'm so sorry! I don't  
watch much TV and -- seriously,  
don't even listen to me.

MORT  
Why? You didn't do anything wrong.

LORI  
Yeah, but -- God, I'm so  
embarrassed right now. I'm sorry.  
Really, I am. I'll get out of your  
hair and let you finish doing your  
thing.

She turns to leave.

Mort can't let her go - something about this girl.

MORT

Wait! I never got your name.

She stops. Turns back, hesitant:

LORI

If I tell you, you have to promise  
not to blackball me from showbiz.  
Deal?

MORT

Deal. Unless you're a commie pinko.

She smiles. They SHAKE.

LORI

Lori Krebs. I'm one of the dancers  
here on the regular nights.

MORT

That's fun.

LORI

Yeah. I like it a lot. At least  
when we're not getting bumped off  
stage for some silly TV show.

They share a grin.

LORI (CONT'D)

So what's it about?

MORT

What?

LORI

Your TV show, genius.

Mort's loving this girl.

MORT

What do you want it to be about?

LORI

Um... I dunno. I like action movies  
about crime. You got any of that?

MORT

Yeah.

LORI

What about celebrities?

MORT  
Got them too.

LORI  
Politics?

MORT  
Yes. You like politics?

LORI  
Not really. But I've been told I  
should follow 'em more.

Mort swoons.

LORI (CONT'D)  
So, basically, if anyone ever asks  
me a question about the Morton  
Downey Jr. Show, the answer is  
always - yes. That about right?

This hits Mort like a bolt of lighting.

MORT  
Tell ya what, why don't you come to  
the show tonight? I'll leave a seat  
open for you right there.

He points to the front row.

LORI  
Yeah?

MORT  
Yeah.

LORI  
(pondering)  
Okay. But it better be  
entertaining.

She WINKS. Exits.

MORT  
(to himself)  
I'll make sure of it.

**INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - SANDS CASINO + HOTEL - NIGHT**

À la West Wing - Mort and the PRODUCERS walk and talk:

BILLY BOGGS

Our priest is at the top. Basically the same views as you, Mort, with just enough room for dispute. But if you get lost or things feel too stale, kick it over to --

REBECCA

-- Andy Humm. He's a prominent member in the gay community and a participant of the National Alliance for Gays and Lesbians.

BILLY BOGGS

He's the first one up at the loudmouths and I'm sure he'll have a LOT to say about the Catholic Church.

MORT

What about my guest?

Confused, Billy looks to:

GOLDSMITH

Taped her off a seat in the front row, Mort. Just like you asked.

MORT

Positive?

GOLDSMITH

Double checked.

BILLY BOGGS

(back on track)

Now, after the second segment, we had an idea to freshen up the audience. --

REBECCA

-- There's going to be pushback from Humm. He's quick and full of soundbites. So we thought that --

Mort stops. The PRODUCERS stop with him.

MORT

I get it. This fag's got fangs. You don't have to do the whole cutesy Nichols & May routine.

Billy and Rebecca share a look. What?

Mort taps the side of his nose.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Secret's out, kids. Get a room.

They blush. Mort continues. The PRODUCERS follow.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Pete, if I get out there and see a  
front row full of nit-wits and  
housewives...

GOLDSMITH  
The seat's there, Mort. Triple  
checked.

Billy catches up.

BILLY BOGGS  
Mort! One last thing.

Getting ahead of the group, he stops in front of a DOOR.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
We have a surprise for you.

The PRODUCERS all share a smile as, with much fanfare, Billy  
opens the DOOR to REVEAL --

# **INT. ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

-- a CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE, stemware and a PIZZA HUT BOX.

MORT  
(confused)  
What is this?

BILLY BOGGS  
Nothing big. Just thought you might  
want to try a slice from our NEW  
sponsor.

Mort's eyes light up.

MORT  
Pizza Hut?!

BILLY BOGGS  
We got 'em.

Mort BEAR-HUGS Billy.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

A rapture of APPLAUSE as Mort scarfs down a slice of PIZZA.

He takes his time. Finishing the whole piece.

MORT

(addressing us)

Y'know what I like about pizza?  
Everybody loves it. EVERYBODY. And  
now, everybody loved me. Because I  
was in the big leagues, baby.  
Corporate sponsors, syndication, my  
face on the cover of every major  
magazine. Hell, I'd been  
interviewed for more spreads and  
locals than the folks I interviewed  
on my own show. And the best part?

Mort leans into the audience, like he's telling a secret.

MORT (CONT'D)

The pussy. Knee-deep, wet and  
flowing like a river. But with this  
unfortunate mug, I couldn't always  
rest on my celebrity laurels. So  
while some men would use their  
charm, others their body, I flexed  
my own set of special skills.

BACK TO:

**INT. PACKED THEATER - SHOWBOAT HOTEL + CASINO - NIGHT**

And we're RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT as the CROWD is hot, the  
cameras are rolling and Mort is on a rampage:

MORT

-- Don't believe a word this guy is  
saying. He's lying to you! The  
whole gay agenda is LYING to you!  
They want to tear down the Catholic  
church and build a disco!

And the target of this vitriol? 30-something ANDY HUMM.

He waits patiently at the audience PODIUM as the crowd dies  
down. Doing his best to keep cool.

Running a victory lap in his head, Mort locks eyes with --

-- Lori Krebs. Front row center. He gives her a WINK.

She WINKS back. Turned on by his school-bully antics.

ANDY HUMM

Disco is dead, Mort. It's outdated  
and nobody listens to it anymore.  
Just like the Catholic church and  
you!

"Ooo" burn.

MORT

Don't knock my religion, pal.  
Catholicism has helped thousands of  
people before you were born. And  
it'll help thousands of people long  
after you're dead. Which, judging  
by your lifestyle, might be soon.

The audience HOOTS and HOLLERS like a peanut gallery.

ANDY HUMM

What's that supposed to mean? You  
saying I have a disease?

MORT

I'm saying "*let he who is without  
sin cast the first stone.*" And you  
don't look like a saint to me.

ANDY HUMM

Right. Because a saint should look  
more like you, a prideful homophobe  
forever in the shadow of his famous  
father.

Another burn. This guy came to play.

Turning up the heat, Mort leans on Andy's podium.

MORT

Okay. You want to get personal?  
Let's get personal. Do you have  
AIDS?

ANDY HUMM

(taken aback)  
What?!

IN THE WINGS, Billy and Rebecca share a look. Horrified.

MORT

It's a pretty simple question. Do  
you have --

Humm becomes emphatic. Spitting as he talks:

ANDY HUMM  
 -- What the hell kinda show is  
 this?! I came here to defend the  
 gay community against the Church,  
 not have my character assassinated  
 by some loudmouth!!

Mort guards his face with his hand.

MORT  
 Whoa, whoa. Keep your body fluids  
 to yourself, buster.

He smirks to Lori. The audience LAUGHS.

But Humm doesn't join them. Instead, he loses it and --

-- SPITS in Mort's face!

ANDY HUMM  
 FUCK. YOU.

Everyone is stunned. Awaiting Mort's reaction.

Wiping off the spit, he looks to Lori. Then Billy.

Just the provocation he needed, Mort winds back and --

MORT  
 Why, you little punk!

-- PUNCHES HUMM in the nose!

Billy leaps onto the stage along with SECURITY.

Holding both men back, a chant emerges from the crowd:

*"FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!"*

BILLY BOGGS  
 Cut the cameras! Cut 'em!

MORT  
 Keep rolling! I'm going to murder  
 this son of a bitch!

Mort struggles hard to break free. And so does Humm.

The talk show looking more like a bar brawl every second.

CUT TO:

**INT. DOCK'S OYSTER HOUSE - SAME NIGHT**

And it's all polished wood, table settings and candle light.

A stark contrast to the mayhem we just witnessed.

Seated in the corner, we find Mort enjoying a romantic dinner with Lori. Still in her denim shorts, she's a bit under-dressed but Mort's eyes don't seem to mind.

LORI

God, that was so crazy tonight. Is the show always that out of control?

MORT

Did you like it?

She thinks. Smiles wide.

LORI

Yeah. Really got my heart pumping.

MORT

Good.

LORI

But aren't you worried that he'll sue or something?

MORT

It's just TV. Everybody knows that.

She sips her drink. Seductively eyeing Mort.

LORI

So, mister big TV star, tell me more about your music.

MORT

Oh, it's just a hobby of mine. My father used to sing so, naturally, I picked it up.

LORI

Sounds like a fairy-tale childhood.

Mort grimaces at the word.

MORT

I grew up in boarding schools, so I wouldn't know.

LORI  
Oh... Well, either way, I still  
think you're really talented. You  
should put out an album.

MORT  
Nah. Really?

LORI  
Yeah. It'd be great.

MORT  
But I'm not a rock star.

LORI  
If sluggin' a guy in the face on  
stage with hundreds of cheering  
fans doesn't make you a rock star,  
then I don't know what does.

Lori's foot rubs up against Mort's inner-leg. He grins.

**INT. BOB PITTMAN'S OFFICE - NEW YORK, NY - DAY**

Back in front of Bob Pittman, Mort and Billy sit quietly as  
he stares them down. Silently chastising them.

Finally:

PITTMAN  
He's pressing charges.

MORT  
What? I barely even tapped the  
twerp! This is bullshit.

Billy notices a TAPE resting securely in Pittman's grip.

BILLY BOGGS  
(re: TAPE)  
What about the episode? Do we still  
run it?

MORT  
Of course we're gonna run it.  
(to Pittman)  
Right? We're gonna run it?

Pittman holds up the TAPE and --

PITTMAN  
This is going to be a very  
expensive lesson.  
(MORE)

PITTMAN (CONT'D)

But seeing as I need to make my position crystal clear, I believe it's worth the money.

-- LIGHTS IT ON FIRE!

MORT

What the hell are you doing? That's a guaranteed 39.7 ratings share!

PITTMAN

No. What it is, is liability. What it is, is bad PR. What it is, is the death rattle of your show after only being syndicated for four months.

He tosses the melted TAPE into the trash.

PITTMAN (CONT'D)

What do you think makes a good television show?

MORT

Me.

BILLY BOGGS

An audience.

PITTMAN (CONT'D)

Very perceptive. And to have an audience, you need to maintain a level of trust, consistency and recruitment. What do I mean by trust? John Q. Armchair needs to trust that you speak for him. That his needs are your needs. What do I mean by consistency? That the standard shock-jock curmudgeon shtick people have come to expect from your show remains above all else. It's a brand. Like Coke or Pepsi. And finally, recruitment. What do I mean by recruitment?

Pittman slowly stands. Getting louder and louder.

PITTMAN (CONT'D)

Well, when you physically assault a fudge-packer based on his faggy opinions on an even faggier Church in front of a live studio audience - it tends to affect the recruitment process! Which, if you haven't noticed how ratings work, is a pretty FUCKING HUGE DEAL!

(MORE)

PITTMAN (CONT'D)

Now I don't care what you have to pay this guy - you settle. And come next week's show, you're going to apologize and hope to God that your audience doesn't evaporate into thin air. Is that clear enough?

Billy remains silent, too scared to talk.

However, Mort just shrugs it off. Calm, collected.

MORT

Look. I'll admit it got a little out of hand. But that's what the people wanted.

PITTMAN

Don't fuck with my network, Mort.

MORT

Okay, okay. I got an idea that'll fix it all up. Trust me. This'll make everything better.

**INT. BASEMENT - MORT'S HOME - ENGLEWOOD, NJ - DAY**

MORT

JOAN?! HONEY?!

Wading through BOXES of holiday junk and personal effects, Mort is in frantic search for:

MORT (CONT'D)

Have you seen my address book?!  
Y'know, the old brown one I used to keep up in the sock drawer?

He rips through boxes like a dog digging for a bone.

MORT (CONT'D)

JOAN?!

No response. Mort halts his carnage to yell louder:

MORT (CONT'D)

BABY?!

Suddenly, he notices --

-- Joan, standing silent at the bottom of the stairs. The BROWN ADDRESS BOOK in her hand.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Oh, hey! You found it.

Relieved, he reaches for it. Joan tightens her grip.

JOAN  
No.  
(off his look)  
I'm not going to let you use him  
like that.

Mort SIGHS.

MORT  
I'm NOT going to use him,  
sweetheart. I just wanna talk to  
him.

JOAN  
It's been 10 years, Mort. And now,  
all of a sudden, you want to talk?

MORT  
Look. It's not like that. I just  
think he'd do really great things  
for the show, is all.

JOAN  
You mean "do really great things  
for you."

MORT  
No. I didn't say that, did I? Now  
lemme see the book.

He reaches again. She pulls back, hesitant.

MORT (CONT'D)  
(forcing a smile)  
C'mon. Would I lie to you?

JOAN  
I don't know. Would you? I heard  
about the tour, Mort. And the  
women.

MORT  
What women?! From who?

Joan keeps quiet.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Honey, you know me.

She nods, growing misty-eyed.

JOAN

That's what I'm afraid of...

Mort moves to hug his wife, his hand closing in on the ADDRESS BOOK - but she stops him:

JOAN (CONT'D)

(a bargaining chip)

Just promise me one thing. That you'll take care of Kelli's tuition when the time comes. Will you do that?

MORT

Of course I will. You know I'd do anything for my little girl.

She lets the BOOK slip into his hands as he holds her.

MORT (CONT'D)

And there's no other women, sweetheart. It's just you. Nobody else.

Holding back the tears, she wants to believe him.

# **INT. PACKED STUDIO - WWOR-TV STATION - NIGHT**

And the show is underway as Mort is up on stage addressing the camera. Addressing the audience. Addressing us.

The "beast" - normally rowdy - sits quietly as:

MORT

Now last week you guys might have noticed how Friday's program was a rerun from right here on the set - rather than a new show from Atlantic City. Well, unfortunately, it looks like I got myself into some hot water, gang. But tonight, I intend to make it up to you. Stay tuned, 'cause it's a bombshell!

CHEERS from the crowd as...

... the ridiculously '80s INTRO THEME plays.

IN THE WINGS -- the PRODUCERS all linger with bated breath.

Billy looks to Jim Langan.

BILLY BOGGS

You really think this is going to work? The "softer side" of Mort?

JIM LANGAN

What softer side?

Billy takes in his apathy. Maybe he's right?

Suddenly, a hand grabs his. Squeezes it. It's Rebecca.

BACK TO STAGE -- Mort grandstands once more:

MORT

Tonight, we're talking about homosexuality and AIDS. And that bombshell I promised? Well, it's a doozy, because I'm going to introduce you to the brother of a celebrity now. He's gonna come out of the closet, he's an AIDS patient and he's dying.

Mort turns to introduce --

MORT (CONT'D)

C'mon up here, pal. Don't be shy.

-- A bespectacled MAN with thinning hair and an earnest expression. Though he seems healthy enough, his gaunt cheeks and wobbly posture betray his relatively young age. Mid-40s.

Now, shoulder to shoulder, Mort puts his arm around:

MORT (CONT'D)

This is Tony. Downey is his last name and he's my brother.

The audience is dumbfounded as this sinks in. Mouths agape.

Wasting no time:

MORT (CONT'D)

I love my brother. I know who he is and, no matter what he chooses to do with his life, I'll always love him very much. Now frankly, I was a bit concerned that my audience would abandon me because of him. That maybe you good folks would see my gay brother and somehow think less of me.

His guilt trip crashes onto the crowd like a wave.

Mort lingers here for dramatic effect, then --

MORT (CONT'D)

But then I said to myself: "Y'know  
what? I don't give a SHIT!"

-- dives right back into character. And a ROAR of support is  
with him as the audience transforms back into the "beast."

FANATIC #1

You tell 'em, Mort!

FANATIC #2

We're with you, Mort!

EVERYONE

MORT! MORT! MORT!

IN THE WINGS -- The PRODUCERS all exchange looks.

Relieved, but secretly disappointed.

JIM LANGAN

Guy's got more lives than 10 cats  
combined.

# **INT. BACKSTAGE - WWOR-TV STATION - LATER**

A chorus of CHEERS echo as Mort retreats backstage like a  
gladiator exiting the coliseum.

He wipes the sweat from his forehead as his brother, TONY  
DOWNEY, takes in the surroundings.

TONY

Boy, this is intense, Mort. How  
many people are out there, y'think?

MORT

76 million.

TONY

No way.

Mort turns to his brother. Faux-smile.

MORT

Thanks for coming, Tony. I really  
appreciate you doing this for me.

TONY

No problem. Hey, at least we got a chance to talk for a little bit, right?

Mort turns his attention to a VANITY MIRROR, eyeing his reflection to fix his tie.

Hair.

Check his teeth.

MORT

Sure, sure.

TONY

Hey, did you really mean all those things you said out there?

MORT

What?

TONY

Y'know. All that stuff about takin' care of me and... still lovin' me and stuff?

MORT

Tony. Of course. You didn't think I flew you all the way out here just to use you as a prop, did you?

TONY

(guilty)

Well... I know we kinda had a falling out after I told you I was gay, so...

Mort grabs Tony by the shoulders. Looks into his eyes.

MORT

We're brothers, you and me. And regardless of what happened in the past, I'll always be there for you. Gay or straight. It doesn't matter.

TONY

Thanks, Mort. It... It makes me really happy to hear that.

MORT

Hey. Let's grab drinks after. Catch up. How does that sound?

Tony smiles, heartfelt.

TONY  
I would love that.

Mort PATS him on the back.

MORT  
Great. I gotta get back out there.  
Commercial break's almost up.

He leaves Tony and moves toward the STUDIO ENTRANCE.

Passing Billy, he grabs him by the arm and pulls him close.

MORT (CONT'D)  
(muttering)  
Get that pansy outta here now.

BILLY BOGGS  
Who? Your brother?

MORT  
I want him on a plane in the next  
10 minutes, Boggs. I'm not fuckin'  
around. Get him out. And get me a  
new shirt. He touched this one.

Mort moves back into the studio, leaving Billy horrified.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

Mort waves a NEWSPAPER with a header that reads:

"DOWNEY'S COMPASSION COMES OUT OF THE CLOSET!"

MORT  
(monologuing)  
Proof that you can't keep a good  
man down. And, baby, I wasn't just  
good - I was on FIRE! Because not  
only were my ratings up a full 3  
point share, but our sponsors? They  
doubled! Everybody wanted to be in  
the Morton Downey Jr. business. And  
why wouldn't they? I was on  
weeknights at 9 and more popular  
than the goddamn Superbowl!

He tosses the PAPER into the dark abyss of the audience.

## MORT (CONT'D)

A powerhouse TV personality with the whole fuckin' world lining up to be on my show... and all I could think about was her. I mean, this girl... She was everything a guy like me should be with. Pretty, cute, fun. I just had to have her.

And suddenly, we get Rick-rolled as --

BACK TO:

-- "NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP" plays over...

**SPLIT-SCREEN MONTAGE:**LEFT SCREENRIGHT SCREEN

- |                                                                                       |                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Mort and Lori shopping. He tries on ACID-WASH JEANS. She loves them. He buys them. | 1) Mort and FAMILY shopping... For groceries. The stale life of a husband/father.      |
| 2) Mort gets his left ear pierced and fitted with a CROSS EARRING as Lori cheers.     | 2) Joan tries to seduce Mort, rubbing his chest. He waves her off. Rolls over.         |
| 3) Mort moves Lori into a downtown PENTHOUSE. She jumps up and down, excited.         | 3) Mort and Joan move Kelli into her college DORM ROOM. He masks his resentment.       |
| 4) Mort presents Lori with a sparkling DIAMOND NECKLACE. She loves it! They kiss.     | 4) Mort presents Joan with a plain turquoise BROOCH. She feigns a smile. No kiss.      |
| 5) Mort serenades Lori with his GUITAR during a picnic. Both touchy feely.            | 5) Joan serves Mort breakfast. He checks his watch. Exits without touching it, or her. |
| 6) Mort and Lori speed up the coast in a WHITE PORSCHE 911. Top-down. All smiles.     | 6) The STAFF loiter on-set, waiting for Mort to arrive. He doesn't. Billy's furious.   |

**END MONTAGE.**

DISSOLVE TO:

**TV NEWS FOOTAGE**

Of Attorney General ROBERT ABRAMS at a PRESS CONFERENCE, overwhelmed by MICS and FLASHING CAMERAS:

ROBERT ABRAMS

*"It was alleged that Tawana Brawley was abducted, sexually abused, raped, sodomized - over a 4 day period - by three to six men, one of whom was a police officer. Those allegations are untrue. The people who made those allegations, lied."*

PULL OUT to REVEAL --

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - WWOR-TV STATION - DAY**

-- and all the PRODUCERS are watching. Minus Billy.

ROBERT ABRAMS (V.O.)

*"Tawana Brawley was NOT the victim of a forcible sexual assault. In fact, there is no evidence that ANY sexual assault occurred."*

GOLDSMITH

Dammit. There goes Monday's and Tuesday's shows.

REBECCA

So she just made the whole thing up? Why?

JIM LANGAN

We're talking about her, aren't we?

GOLDSMITH

Harsh. She's just a teenager, Jim.

JIM LANGAN

Right. And what do all teenagers want?

Suddenly the TV CLICKS OFF as --

BILLY BOGGS (O.C.)

Attention.

-- Billy enters the room. Drops the remote onto the desk.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

But from now on she'll have to get it from somewhere else because this story is cooked. Nobody trusts her anymore. Which means people aren't going to tune in if all we're running is Tawana Brawley crap.

He takes a seat.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

So what else do we got? Anyone have any new issues for next week?

A moment of hesitation as they all shuffle through BINDERS, searching endlessly like a student trying to avoid being called on.

REBECCA

How about "feminism on the front lines?"

BILLY BOGGS

No. We've already pumped that well dry. We need something fresh.

GOLDSMITH

Like what? The death penalty, immigration, racism, budget reform. We've drilled all the serious issues out there. The Tawana case was the only real thing we had left.

BILLY BOGGS

C'mon, guys. I'm not looking for diamonds, just something we can sell Mort on.

JIM LANGAN

(muttering)

You really think he'll give two shits?

BILLY BOGGS

What's that supposed to mean?

Jim gives Billy a look.

JIM LANGAN

Mort doesn't care about the show. He cares about the pussy. Why else do you think he's trying to start a "music career" all of a sudden? So he can impress that showboat slut. I mean, has anyone else seen his earring yet?

(laughing)

Who's he trying to be, George Michael?

No one comes to Mort's defence.

JIM LANGAN (CONT'D)

And that's not even the funny part.  
The funny part is it's one o'clock  
on a Wednesday and we have FIVE  
shows next week with nothing to  
fill them and where is Mort, our  
fearless leader?

BILLY BOGGS

Alright.

JIM LANGAN

In a recording studio, trying to  
capitalize on his fifteen minutes  
of fame before the lights come on  
and America sees him for who he  
really is.

BILLY BOGGS

Alright! We get it! We all get it,  
okay?! Now just shut up!

Billy tosses his CLIPBOARD as Jim does what he's told.

Concerned, Rebecca and the STAFF all sit frozen.

Rubbing his head, Billy checks his watch and exits in a huff.

# **INT. MIXING BOOTH - RECORDING STUDIO - DAY**

We focus on MIXERS, SLIDERS and lit-up AUDIO BARS as --

VOICE (O.C.)

Roll track. Ready in 3... 2...

-- a steady GUITAR STRUM starts us off.

PANNING UP, we see Mort in the **AUDIO BOOTH** through the glass.

He steps to the MIC and:

MORT

*"Hey there, Mr. Dealer...  
Ya drug pushin' son of a bitch...  
Messin' up the minds of the kids of  
America just to make your fat ass  
rich...  
You're the sleaze-bag of the  
country. The garbage of our land...  
The devil is a'waitin' just to  
welcome you to your eternal promise  
land."*

Mort continues to sing as Lori WAVES at him. Turned on.

Suddenly, Billy enters the **MIXING BOOTH**. And he's pissed.

LORI  
Hey, Bi --

BILLY BOGGS  
Turn it off. I need to talk to him.

LORI  
(defensive)  
About what?

Annoyed, Billy looks to the SOUND MIXER manning the panel.

BILLY BOGGS  
Do it. Now.

Hesitant, Lori gets in-between the two.

LORI  
I don't think that's a good idea.  
Mort's just getting warmed up and --

Billy pushes past her and enters the...

LORI (CONT'D)  
HEY!

#### **AUDIO BOOTH - CONTINUOUS**

... disrupting Mort.

BILLY BOGGS  
What the hell are you doing here?!  
You promised me that you'd come in  
today.

Lori runs in after him.

LORI  
Sorry, baby. He just ran past me.

Mort holds up his hands, trying to calm the situation

MORT  
It's okay, Lori. He's fine. You're  
fine, right, Billy?

BILLY BOGGS  
Do I look like I'm fine to you?

MORT

Listen. I know I promised that I was gonna come in today and I am. Once I finish this track, I'll be there.

BILLY BOGGS

Oh, you will?

MORT

Yeah. Just like I said I would be.

BILLY BOGGS

Okay. Great. Well, I don't know if your precious TV show will be there waiting for you but, by all means, take your FUCKING time.

Billy moves toward the door.

MORT

Wait. What's wrong?

BILLY BOGGS

Try watching TV instead of being on it for a change.

And he's gone. Leaving Mort worried and Lori upset.

# **INT. MORT'S OFFICE - WWOR-TV STATION - NIGHT**

The only room with lights still on, darkness swallows the outside hallways and windows. It's late. And Mort is DRINKING alone.

Suddenly -- KNOCK, KNOCK -- Billy enters. He's clearly cooled off.

BILLY BOGGS

(re: booze)

That the top shelf stuff?

MORT

Thirsty?

Mort pours and hands him a GLASS.

MORT (CONT'D)

(cheers)

To the Tawana Brawley case. Our golden goose who left too soon.

BILLY BOGGS

To Tawana.

They drink.

MORT

Stay awhile. Take a load off.

Billy moves to the couch to find a pile of --

-- discarded LETTERS.

BILLY BOGGS

Getting your mail here now?

MORT

Just toss 'em on the floor.

Upon further inspection we see "OVER DUE NOTICE," and "SECOND ATTEMPT" stamped all over them.

BILLY BOGGS

Looks important. You sure?

MORT

Yeah. S'just bullshit.

Billy swipes them away and takes their place.

MORT (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I've been hard to pin down lately, Billy. It's just, with this album and --

BILLY BOGGS

What are you doing, man?

(off Mort's confusion)

With this girl. What are you doing?

MORT

I'm having fun. That illegal?

BILLY BOGGS

You know I care about you, Mort. But how long do you really think this is going to last?

MORT

What are you saying, that she's some kinda gold-digger?

BILLY BOGGS

I'm saying that she's young. And like all women her age, they're looking for a thrill. Excitement.

MORT

So?

BILLY BOGGS

So you're a 55-year-old man with a family, Mort. What happens when you're not... exciting enough?

Mort considers this. A seed of doubt. Then:

MORT

(not buying it)

I'm a 55-year-old man with a talk show and millions of fans. That's plenty exciting.

BILLY BOGGS

Yeah. It is. But how do we keep it that way? Because we got nothing for next week and the audience is all booked.

MORT

Jesus. Atop the ratings mountain and we already lost the fuckin' flag.

BILLY BOGGS

And the gear and oxygen tanks.

They share a SMILE. Mort lights a cigarette.

MORT

How'd we do it? How'd we climb here so fast?

BILLY BOGGS

We turned every important issue into a car crash and made it so people couldn't look away. Problem is, people are tired of hearing about issues and they're tired of hearing about politics.

MORT

(gears turning)

So we need to give them something new. Something... compelling.

BILLY BOGGS  
Ideally? Yeah.

The hamster-wheel in Mort's head finally powers a bulb.  
Eureka. A devilish smile creeps across his face.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
What?

PRE-LAP of TIRES SCREECHING as...

CUT TO:

**RAPID GRAINY FOOTAGE OF:**

Car crashes.

BODIES on stretchers.

Bloody windshields.

Flashing red lights.

More BODIES.

BLOOD everywhere.

More CAR CRASHES!

It's highway accident porn and we're jerking off.

PULL OUT to REVEAL --

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

-- the IMAGES projecting over the curtain backdrop.

Projecting over Mort himself. Like camouflage.

MORT  
(to audience, to us)  
Look at you. Billy was right.  
You're loving this. And why not?  
It's thrilling. It's exciting. It's  
a goddamn rock show. Who needs  
current events? Who needs bullshit  
social justice? I had morbid  
curiosity on my side.  
(MORE)

MORT (CONT'D)  
 The one-click-away-can't-look-away  
 television that most only dream of.  
Finally, the right sound - the  
 right instrument - to do what I  
 promised you I WOULD do. Change TV  
 forever.

BACK TO:

**INT. PACKED STUDIO - WWOR-TV STATION - NIGHT**

The fans are HOWLING as Mort makes his way out --  
 -- in his UNDERWEAR!

And he's up on stage, addressing the TV cameras:

MORT  
 Alright all you cellulite creeps,  
 this is the show you've been  
 waiting for. Nudists! Do they bare  
 it all for love or LOVE to bare it  
 all?

SFX CAR CRASH.

JUMP CUT:

Mort now in a SPIKED-DOG COLLAR.

MORT (CONT'D)  
 (still addressing cameras)  
 -- Sadomasochism. S&M. Is it sex  
 with a twist or twisted sex?!

SFX CAR CRASH. Louder.

JUMP CUT:

Mort in a CAMO Tee and face paint, holding a PAINTBALL GUN.

MORT (CONT'D)  
 -- Nazi Paintball Clubs. Are they  
 harmless fun or a fun way to  
 inflict harm?!

SFX CAR CRASH. LOUDER!

JUMP CUT:

Mort wearing a WIG and a DRESS.

MORT (CONT'D)

-- "Dude looks like a lady." We've all heard the pop song over the radio. But what about the real "dudes" that look like ladies? Are they shemales or females? Tonight on the Morton Downey Jr. Show!

*SFX CAR CRASH. A TEN-CAR PILE-UP!*

And as the CROWD cheers we PAN OVER --

-- IN THE WINGS, to see Billy and the PRODUCERS looking on.

GOLDSMITH

Jesus H. What the hell is he doing?

JIM LANGAN

It's a pariah-parade of nuts and sluts to get attention. Pathetic.

REBECCA

The dress was a nice touch.

JIM LANGAN

Thanks. I picked it out.

Rebecca NUDGES Jim. They laugh. But Billy isn't smiling.

BILLY BOGGS

You're right. It is pathetic.

Rebecca looks to Billy. Disappointment on his face.

Unable to watch anymore, he retreats into the...

# **BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS**

... as Rebecca follows.

REBECCA

Hey. You okay?

He ignores her and keeps walking. She cuts him off.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Billy! It's just a show. You told me that, remember? Entertainment.

BILLY BOGGS

Well, it's not entertaining to me.  
He's turning our public forum into  
a circus where the only thing that  
matters are soundbites and props!

REBECCA

Let's get out of here, okay? Get  
some food?

Billy calms down. NODS.

**INT. TOPS DINER - NIGHT**

Sharing a PIE, Rebecca and Billy LAUGH like new lovers over  
an inside joke. Any frustration long since forgotten.

REBECCA

-- So, wait, how'd you end up going  
from a channel 5 reporter to  
channel 9 producer? Seems like  
there's a story there.

BILLY BOGGS

Not an interesting one.

She makes eyes at him. He blushes.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

I wanted to get into something more  
substantial. Really explore the  
topics instead of just the black  
and white. So I started listening  
to the radio. My uncle told me  
about this guy who was like Howard  
Stern for drive-time politics.

REBECCA

Morton Downey Jr. I presume?

BILLY BOGGS

No, actually. It was some Bronx guy  
with a thick accent and a lot of  
sound effects.

Rebecca laughs.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

But after him, there was Mort. And,  
while I didn't agree with  
everything he said, he certainly  
had a way of saying it.

REBECCA  
What do you mean?

BILLY BOGGS  
It's hard to explain. Like  
listening to a debate and not  
knowing who won.

REBECCA  
But you were listening.

BILLY BOGGS  
Exactly. It didn't matter who beat  
who because - love him or hate him -  
you at least came away with more  
knowledge about the issue.

REBECCA  
And now?

A frustration and disappointment returns to Billy's face.

Rebecca reaches for his hand - comforting. He smiles.

#### **INT. BILLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

On the COUCH, Rebecca and Billy go at it like teens at a  
Summer camp. It's hot and heavy.

Their skin lit only by the dim hue of the TV, we PUSH through  
the lust to REVEAL --

ON SCREEN:

-- TED KOPPEL. Muted. As he interviews a TV CRITIC and...

#### **FULL TV SCREEN - UNMUTED**

TED KOPPEL  
*Mort, do you consider your show to  
be a news program?*

MORT  
*I do consider it to be a news  
program. Yes, there's an element of  
entertainment to it. But ultimately  
that's what people want to see.*

TED KOPPEL  
*Bill, do you think there's a danger  
of confusing this entertainment  
news show for a real news show?*

TV CRITIC

*Of course. And, as more shows like Mort's proliferate, the danger is that we lower our standards for legitimate journalism to that of a demolition derby.*

TED KOPPEL

*But yet, as we speak, Mort Downey's program is beating Nightline's ratings in many cities.*

TV CRITIC

*Check again in a month and you'll see that it doesn't sustain its audience because, like any shock-value thing, the theatricality eventually wears off.*

TED KOPPEL

*Mort?*

MORT

*(snarling)*

*Look. People know how football works - they've seen every play in the book - but that doesn't mean they stop watching it.*

TV CRITIC

*But football is a game, Mr. Downey. Politics and public diplomacy aren't.*

*Mort LAUGHS off the CRITIC's gall.*

TED KOPPEL

*Mort, one last question. People will watch almost anything you put on if it's controversial enough, but how much further can it go?*

*Mort sours. A genuine fear hidden behind puffed up words:*

MORT

*As far as I want to take it.*

# **INT. BREAKROOM - WWOR-TV STATION - DAY**

Pete Goldsmith, Jim Langan and a few other PRODUCERS hang around drinking coffee and eating bagels.

It's an easy atmosphere until --

-- Mort blows in!

He beelines to the coffee as Lori trails in and grabs a Coke.

The producers all eye one another, frozen.

MORT

Before any of you say a single word  
about last night's interview, I  
want the numbers.

GOLDSMITH

Uh... Mort?

MORT

Numbers, Pete. Read 'em out.

GOLDSMITH

I don't have them, but --

MORT

Jim? Numbers?

JIM LANGAN

(eyeing Pete)

Mort, you should really know  
something --

Mort SMASHES the coffee pot onto the floor!

Everyone reacts except for Lori, who rolls her eyes. A  
tantrum she's seen before?

MORT

NUMBERS! Goddammit, where's Boggs?

JIM LANGAN

They're not in yet.

MORT

Whose they?

He looks around. Doing a mental rollcall.

GOLDSMITH

Mort?

MORT

WHAT?!

GOLDSMITH

Your wife's in your office.

A look from Lori. Mort gathers himself - a little scared.

**INT. MORT'S OFFICE - DAY**

Mort enters to find Joan gripping a handful of his discarded LETTERS. Eyes wet with imminent tears, a wall of resolve holds her together...

Barely.

JOAN

Do you think so little of me?

MORT

(walking on eggshells)

Joan...

She cringes as her name rolls off his tongue.

JOAN

Just don't. Don't tell me another lie. I already know about everything, Mort. But for some stupid reason I thought that, at the very least, you always came home to me. That no matter who you fucked out there in the world, they didn't have your respect. Your devotion. That they didn't have your heart. But it's been seven months now and your fling with this girl - because that's what she is - has turned into an obsession. So there's just one thing I need to know. And I need to know it now. Do you love her?

Mort stays silent. It crushes her.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Answer me!

He doesn't.

Joan grimaces and hugs herself. Gulping her sobs, we finally see her heart break into a million pieces.

Mort moves in to console her but --

SMACK!

-- she swats him across the face.

Mort reels back, giving her distance.

Wiping her tears in an attempt to preserve what dignity she has left, Joan can't bring herself to look at him.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's fine if you do. In fact, I know you do. It took me some long nights but I've gotten used to it. I hardly even cry anymore. But Kelli still does.

MORT

How is she?

JOAN

She got kicked out of Stanford.

Holding up the "OVERDUE" stamped LETTERS:

JOAN (CONT'D)

You never paid her tuition so they had no choice but to drop her. She's home now.

MORT

What? But I sent the check --

JOAN

-- Please...

She drops the LETTERS back onto the couch.

Slowly composing herself:

JOAN (CONT'D)

I heard you finally recorded some songs. When's the album coming out?

MORT

... Next month.

She smiles - heartfelt.

JOAN

That's great. I'm really happy for you. I always loved it when you sang to me.

MORT

Well, maybe I'll bring some of the tapes over when it debuts.

JOAN

No. I don't think so.

A somber beat lingers.

Joan's red, puffy eyes find the courage to meet Mort's:

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Does she love you?

MORT  
Yeah... I think so.

Joan puts her hand on Mort's face.

JOAN  
For your sake, I hope so.

She kisses him on the cheek and --

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Goodbye, Mort.

-- exits.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

The spotlight seems lonely now as it singles out Mort.

For the first time he has nothing to say.

Combined with the eerie silence from the audience, you could hear a pin drop.

The stillness carries over...

BACK TO:

**INT. PORSCHE 911 - DRIVING - NIGHT**

... As Mort cruises with Lori.

The low hum of the road and the smack of RAIN on the windshield is all that fills the silence between them.

His head heavy with worry, Mort grabs Lori's hand:

MORT  
You know I love you.

She smiles back. Flippant.

MORT (CONT'D)

And you love me too, right? Even without the show? Or my music?

LORI

You're not getting canceled, are you?

MORT

No, no, no. Just... a hypothetical.

She playfully slaps him.

LORI

Oh. You're just being silly.

Mort feigns a smile. Not the answer he was hoping for.

**INT. BILLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

A furious KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK forces Billy to the door. Wearing boxers and a T, he's clearly been sleeping in all day.

He opens on -- Mort. Soaked from head to toe.

BILLY BOGGS

Jesus! You walk all the way here?  
You're drenched.

Billy pulls Mort inside.

MORT

Where were you today?

BILLY BOGGS

I worked from home. That alright?

Mort pushes past Billy, exploring the apartment.

MORT

Where is she?!

BILLY BOGGS

Who?

MORT

Don't gimme that shit. You didn't come in because you were here fuckin' REBECCA!

He pulls open a CLOSET hoping to catch her - but nothing.

BILLY BOGGS  
She's not here. And yeah. I was.  
How is that any of your business?

MORT  
Because I NEEDED you today.

Billy sits.

BILLY BOGGS  
I know... I heard. You okay?

Mort slumps against the wall.

MORT  
I'm hurtin', Billy.

BILLY BOGGS  
Well then, you're going to need a  
drink. Schlitz?

Mort NODS as Billy enters the KITCHENETTE.

MORT  
How was she? Rebecca?

BILLY BOGGS  
A gentleman never tells.

MORT  
Fuck you, gentleman.

Billy tosses a BEER at Mort. He drinks it down.

MORT (CONT'D)  
You like her?

BILLY BOGGS  
Yeah. A lot.

MORT  
She like you?

BILLY BOGGS  
I hope so.

Mort's LAUGH quickly turns into a CRY.

Billy circles to him and PATS him out of it.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
Hey, these things happen. It's  
going to hurt for a little while,  
but it'll get better. I promise.

MORT  
(composing himself)  
Do you have the numbers?

BILLY BOGGS  
The ratings? Is that really  
important right now?

MORT  
It is to me.

Confused, Billy shuffles through some PAPERS and hands Mort a  
SPREAD-SHEET. Mort takes it in. Smiling. Comforted.

BILLY BOGGS  
The people still love you, Mort.  
Highest ratings we've ever had.  
But... there is something we have  
to talk about. It's the San  
Francisco affiliate.

MORT  
What about 'em?

BILLY BOGGS  
They officially dropped the show  
last night.

Mort crumples up the SHEET.

MORT  
Those fuckin' faggots.

BILLY BOGGS  
See. That right there is the  
problem. The show's getting too  
abrasive and sponsors are nervous  
that your opinions are affecting  
their products' public image.

MORT  
Which sponsors?

BILLY BOGGS  
We got warning letters from three.

MORT  
Pizza Hut?

Billy nods. Mort SIGHS.

BILLY BOGGS  
I'm not telling you to change your  
views, Mort.  
(MORE)

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
But we need to cool it on these  
morbid sideshows and get legitimate  
guests back on.

MORT  
What about Sharpton? He was always  
a big draw.

BILLY BOGGS  
Yeah. He was. Maybe you could talk  
to him?

MORT  
Yeah. Okay. And San Francisco?

BILLY BOGGS  
I'm flying there tomorrow to meet  
with other stations. Build us a  
back-up plan just in case I can't  
get our affiliate to reconsider.

MORT  
How are you going to make them do  
that?

BILLY BOGGS  
With you.

Billy hands Mort a PLANE TICKET.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
Our meeting's Friday morning. KPIX  
station, 3rd floor. Think you can  
play nice for a few days till then?

Mort smiles.

#### **INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - DAY**

FLASH, FLASH, FLASH.

Blinding flickers of a CAMERA BULB wash over --

-- Al Sharpton, as he poses in a red clerical collar.

Full of artificial lights and artificial ARTISTS, everything  
about this photoshoot smacks of self importance.

Enter Mort - watching from the background.

AL SHARPTON  
(noticing)  
Brother Mort! To what do I owe the  
pleasure?

Mort approaches, staying out of the PHOTOGRAPHERS shot.

MORT  
Hey, Al. You doing a spread for  
Playboy or something?

A shared snicker.

AL SHARPTON  
Spin Magazine. They're doing a  
whole piece on me this week.

MORT  
Congrats. Don't think I've been in  
that one yet.

Al poses. FLASH.

AL SHARPTON  
What brings you downtown?

MORT  
Well, we're putting our Wednesday  
show together and naturally I  
thought of you.

AL SHARPTON  
What's the topic?

MORT  
Strippers for God.

Another pose. FLASH.

AL SHARPTON  
Pass.

MORT  
I'm not married to the stripper  
angle. We could really do anything  
you wanted, honestly.

AL SHARPTON  
Thanks for the invite, brother  
Mort, but I'll pass.

MORT

Why do I get the feeling that  
you're avoiding me like the plague,  
Al?

AL SHARPTON

Because I am.

Pose. FLASH.

AL SHARPTON (CONT'D)

Look. You and your show are like a  
stack of pancakes, brother Mort.  
The first few bites of butter and  
syrup are a welcomed oasis from the  
ordinary bowl of cereal. But then,  
halfway through, it becomes a chore  
of chewing bitter soggy flour.

MORT

And that's what I am to you?

AL SHARPTON

It's not personal, brother. But  
people already got a taste and now  
they're pushing the plate back. You  
can't blame them for moving on to  
something else. Something new.

Pose. FLASH.

MORT

(seething)

Like you?

AL SHARPTON

Maybe. But when your show gets  
bussed off the table, I don't  
intend to be tossed out with it.

MORT

You fuckin' piece of SHIT!

Suddenly, the ARTISTS are on edge. Tension fills the air.

MORT (CONT'D)

I thought we were friends -  
scratched each others backs - but  
all that crap about "growing up in  
Brownsville" and the "Abchanchu"  
was just BS, wasn't it?

Sharpton calmly moves inches away from Mort's face.

AL SHARPTON  
 It's amusing that vampires like  
 yourself are surprised when another  
 vampire bites you on the neck.  
 What'd you expect? It's our nature.

Then he stands back to pose. All smiles. FLASH --

**INT. MORT'S OFFICE - WWOR-TV STATION - DAY**

-- SMASH!

A framed magazine of Mort explodes against the wall!

Absolutely furious, Mort tosses another picture. SMASH!

KICKING HIS DESK OVER, Mort falls back into his chair. His head in his hands, he swears under his breath; struggling to control his white-hot temper.

Then, through the hallway window he sees --

-- Rebecca. Cheery as she moves down the corridor.

MORT  
 Hey! Hey!

He pounds on the glass, startling her.

MORT (CONT'D)  
 Come in here.

Concerned, she circles INTO his office. Taking in the destruction:

REBECCA  
 Whoa. What happened?

MORT  
 You're in a good mood, huh?

REBECCA  
 What?

MORT  
 You look like you're in a good mood. What's the occasion? What are you so happy about?

Mort's loosing it. And she can tell.

REBECCA  
 ... Nothing.

MORT

Nothing? It doesn't have anything to do with the show? It doesn't have anything to do with me? It's just... nothing?

Scared now, Rebecca goes mute.

MORT (CONT'D)

Tell ya what? I always liked you. And having a good mood is perfect for your NEW job here. I'm promoting you. Executive assistant to me! How does that sound?

REBECCA

But... I like the job I have.

MORT

No. You're just not thinking clearly. I have an album coming out. I'm a fuckin' television icon! I could have bitches lining up for days to do this job! But instead, I'm giving it to you. Understand?

Petrified, Rebecca musters up a simple NOD.

MORT (CONT'D)

Good!

He leads her into his...

#### **PRIVATE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS**

... and UNZIPS his pants over the toilet. Tearing up, Rebecca doesn't know what to do.

MORT

Take it out!

She hesitates.

MORT (CONT'D)

Hurry up!

Shaking, she reaches toward his zipper.

#### **INT. PACKED STUDIO - NIGHT**

The roaring colosseum is back in full swing as a big breasted BURLESQUE WOMAN is up on stage shouting at Mort:

## BURLESQUE WOMAN

-- And I'm tired of you calling us  
bimbos and whores! We're women!  
We're mothers and daughters!

Mort comes in hot --

## MORT

Sit down you, FAT BITCH!

-- and bodychecks her into her seat. The crowd LOVES it.

## MORT (CONT'D)

This is the slut who works as a  
dominatrix where she beats the hell  
outta men.

(to woman)

I'd love for you to try to beat me,  
honey, I'd show you how to kick the  
livin' shit outta a broad!

The woman PUSHES Mort away as hate spews from the crowd:

*"Hit her, Mort!" "She's a whore, treat her like one!"*

It's a dangerous atmosphere. A lynch mob in the making.

## BURLESQUE WOMAN

Just because I show off my body  
doesn't mean I'm bad. I'm good! And  
I love God! And God made sex. So  
how can it be bad?

## MORT

God didn't make sex. God made man.  
And from the lousy rib of man he  
made a PIG LIKE YOU!

Mort violently RIPS the MIC off her low cut blouse and pushes  
her down.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

Head hung low, Mort smokes in silence. A guilty conscience?

Addressing the dark void of the audience, us:

## MORT

If anybody ever asks you a question  
about the Morton Downey Jr. Show,  
what are you gonna tell 'em?

(MORE)

MORT (CONT'D)

That I was a pioneer? Ahead of my time? Or maybe I was a monster? Out of control?

He drags hard. Contemplating.

MORT (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter. Because either way, the answer was always the same.

Somehow these words don't comfort as much as they used to.

**INT. G4 PRIVATE JET - FLYING - DAY**

Mort and Lori lounge in leather luxury as the only two passengers on board. Sipping his DRINK, Mort eyes Lori across from him. She taps her foot listening to her WALKMAN.

Mort waves to get her attention. She pulls up a HEADPHONE:

LORI

Yeah, babe?

MORT

How about, after my meeting, we grab dinner somewhere nice. Just you and me?

LORI

Let's do the beach instead. Catch some rays before heading back into the city. Cool?

MORT

Sure. Yeah.  
(Lori's headphone snaps  
back into place)  
Cool...

Dejected, he takes another swig - hoping to find the comfort he was looking for at the bottom of his glass.

**INT. KIPX STATION - 3RD FLOOR - SAN FRANCISCO, CA - DAY**

Mort checks his watch as he speed walks up to a RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Downey. Welcome. They're waiting for you in the boardroom.

**INT. KIPX BOARDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Mort enters.

And it's empty.

Just a big table, chairs and --

-- Billy. Whose's boiling under the surface.

MORT

Where is everybody? I'm not that late, am I?

BILLY BOGGS

I already had the meeting. They're just letting me use the room.

MORT

Oh... So what's the verdict? Are they still going to carry the show?

BILLY BOGGS

What the FUCK is wrong with you?

Mort twists his face, confused.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

You know, for a denim demigod, you certainly have the courage of your ignorance.

MORT

Billy...

BILLY BOGGS

You made her hold your cock while you took a piss, Mort!

MORT

Okay. I admit that was a mistake --

BILLY BOGGS

YOU are the mistake! You're like a black hole of self-destruction. Pulling everyone around you down just so you can stand on their shoulders and claim to be six-feet-famous! But you're just a fraud. A local yahoo who deals trash TV weeknights from 9 to news in a desperate attempt to prove yourself better than Daddy!

Nerve hit, Mort POUNDS the table.

MORT  
I'M MORE FAMOUS THAN HE EVER WAS!

BILLY BOGGS  
Celebrity and infamy AREN'T the  
same thing, you psycho!

MORT  
Fuck you! Y'know people might not  
respect me, but they sure as hell  
LOVE ME! Why else am I on 76  
million TVs across the country?

BILLY BOGGS  
(correcting)  
48 million. You're done here. No  
affiliate on the West coast will  
touch you anymore.

MORT  
Oh, that's rich! This some sorta  
payback for your little girl  
friend?!

BILLY BOGGS  
No. You did that all by yourself  
when you brutalized a WOMAN in  
front of the home-viewers who  
supposedly "love you."

Another blow to Mort. A deeper cut.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
Wake the fuck up, Mort. No one  
loves you. You know why? Because  
you're a fad. An eccentric trend. A  
fling high school girls have with  
the bad boy in the leather jacket.  
But it never lasts. And it's always  
forgotten. Just like you will be.

Mort's bleeding now.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
I know I'm under contract. And I'll  
honor that much. Producer in name  
only. But your head's on the  
chopping block now.

Billy gathers his things and pushes past Mort.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)  
And I hope they cut it the fuck  
off.

**EXT. BAKER BEACH - SAN FRANCISCO, CA - DAY**

The Golden Gate Bridge shimmers in the background, looking over the beach bods and their neon swimwear. In a particularly revealing bikini, Lori flirts with some muscle heads as we spot Mort --

-- sitting in the sand, deadeyes on the horizon.

A desperation growing with every crashing wave.

**INT. SAN FRAN. AIRPORT BATHROOM - DAY**

And we're back to the opening.

It's empty, save for Mort. And he looks like Hell.

SWASTIKA drawn over his face, he stares down his reflection in the mirror. An intense self hatred.

MORT (V.O.)  
Nobody loved me until I started  
yelling... Nobody. Not even you!

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

Mort points menacingly at the audience. At us.

MORT  
After all the SHIT I went through  
to give you what you wanted and now  
I'm the bully? You want to crucify  
me?! No way, pal. NO. FUCKING. WAY.  
I'm not the bad guy here. Billy's  
wrong. Tell me. Tell me he's wrong.

Silence.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Tell me he's wrong!

Nothing.

MORT (CONT'D)  
TELL ME --

Suddenly, BOOM. The AUDIENCE LIGHTS come on and REVEAL --  
 -- the theatre patrons from the first time.

It's a slim few. Leaving most the seats empty.

WE SEE the faces of JOAN...

KELLI...

REBECCA...

JIM LANGAN and PETE...

TONY DOWNEY...

AL SHARPTON...

BOB PITTMAN... LORI... But no sign of Billy. Anywhere.

Taking this in, Mort hardens:

MORT (CONT'D)  
 Oh, I see how it is. Cards all on  
 the table, huh? Well, fine. I'll  
 show you. I'll make you love me  
 again. I'll MAKE you LOVE ME!

Mort swings his FIST toward his own face and --

BACK TO:

**INT. SAN FRAN. AIRPORT BATHROOM - SAME AS ABOVE**

-- CRACK!

A string of blood flies out as Mort BREAKS HIS NOSE.

POW. Another hit. POW. Another.

Turning his face black and blue, Mort violently pummels  
 himself into submission.

**TV NEWS FOOTAGE**

Of a standard studio ANCHORMAN:

NEWS ANCHOR  
*"Well, he's the talk show host who  
 left his hair in San Francisco.  
 Morton Downey Jr. claims that he  
 was attacked by skinheads;  
 (MORE)*

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)  
*however, police are not so sure.  
 Matthew Schwartz reports."*

Now -- a live feed from the SAN FRAN. AIRPORT as:

FIELD REPORTER  
*"It was a sobering evening for the  
 controversial talk show host as he  
 had a swastika drawn on his face  
 and some of his hair was missing."*

**B-ROLL** of -- MORT being interviewed:

He cowers in front of the camera. A visible victim.

MORT  
*"I was pushed inside a stall as  
 they were punching me. And the next  
 thing I knew, they wrote something  
 on my face, cut my hair up and said  
 'Now you're one of us, sieg hail!'  
 Then they were gone."*

INTERVIEWER  
*"Were you drunk?"*

MORT  
*"No."*

INTERVIEWER  
*"And there's no doubt that this is  
 what happened to you?"*

MORT  
 (annoyed)  
*"Yeah. I just told you the whole  
 story, didn't I?"*

Back to -- our FIELD REPORTER:

FIELD REPORTER  
*"But some San Francisco airport  
 police and spokesmen don't believe  
 Downey. Stating that:  
 (reading)  
 'There has been no substantiation  
 to any of the statements that Mr.  
 Downey has made.' And that 'No  
 skinheads were found in the area.'  
 But as far as the loudmouth himself  
 is concerned, it not only happened,  
 but will surely be the subject of  
 his next show. Just as soon as he  
 returns to the airwaves."*

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Covered in a gown, Mort rests in a hospital bed as --

-- Lori bursts in!

LORI

Mort! Oh my God!

She hugs him tight.

LORI (CONT'D)

I was so worried when you never got back on the plane! Are you okay?

MORT

Hey, baby.

She kisses his face. Genuinely worried.

LORI

What did the doctor say? Can you walk? What happened?

Mort laughs.

MORT

Yes. I can walk. Just a bit banged up. Doc's gonna release me tomorrow.

LORI

They're saying awful things about you on the news. Just awful things. Like, you made the whole thing up. That it was some attention getting scheme.

MORT

Oh, don't believe that horse shit.

LORI

Of course not. You would never do something like that.

(fluffing his pillow)

Are you comfortable? Do you need me to go get you anything?

MORT

Yeah. There is one thing.

LORI

What?

MORT

Marry me.

Lori freezes.

MORT (CONT'D)

You love me, right?

Before she can respond:

MORT (CONT'D)

Then marry me. We practically live together already. And you won't have to worry about money 'cause with my album dropping in the next few days AND the press off of this thing? My show will be more popular than ever before. We can even incorporate your dancing into it. Really get your art out there for people to see.

Overwhelmed, she thinks it over. A little hesitant.

LORI

Fuck it. Lets do it!

MORT

Yeah?

LORI

Yeah!

They KISS. Another tight hug.

Mort SMILES, milking this for all it's worth.

# **INT. BILLY'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Cleaning off his desk, Billy stuffs his personal effects into a BOX as he watches TV. All NEWS COVERAGE of Downey.

He grabs a FRAMED PHOTO of himself and Mort. Better times.

Contemplating. Keep it or leave it?

Then, Rebecca enters with a BOX of her own.

REBECCA

Ready to go?

BILLY BOGGS

Almost.

REBECCA

(re: photo)

You don't miss him already, do you?

Billy points to the Mort in the PHOTO.

BILLY BOGGS

I miss *this* guy. He actually wasn't half bad.

(gesturing to TV)

But *him*? Never.

REBECCA

You know, you don't have to leave because of me. I wouldn't hold it against you if you stayed. Promise.

He smiles. Drops the PHOTO in the trash.

BILLY BOGGS

Everything's different now. There's nothing for me here. Or you. C'mon.

He turns OFF the TV.

As they move towards the door, Rebecca notices --

-- a LETTER in Billy's WALL INBOX.

REBECCA

(re: letter)

That yours?

BILLY BOGGS

What's it say?

She pulls it to REVEAL the words: **"Pittman. Urgent."**

Billy smirks.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

Oh, boy. I know JUST the person to deliver that message.

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - WWOR-TV STATION - NEW JERESY - DAY**

Goldsmith, Jim Langan and a few BOOKERS eat their donuts and drink their morning lattes as Mort grandstands before them.

With some band-aids and a baseball CAP, he poorly masks his cuts and bruises.

MORT

The 12th I'll be on Pat Sajack then the Joan Lunden Show that following Tuesday. So we need to tease the hell outta my comeback episode. Really give folks something to latch onto. Something that pops.

(presenting)

"Morton Downey Jr. The mouth that refused to be silenced." And for our panel? We could bus in some skinheads and go head to head. But this time, we put ME in the hot seat and turn the show over to our audience. Like a town hall debate.

Pete and Langan eye one another.

MORT (CONT'D)

No good? What about --

(presenting)

-- "Morton Downey Jr. The mad king motor-mouth still smiling." And it could be like a tribute show where we bring back some of our most popular guests?

Langan COUGHS. Mort looks to him as he places a --

-- LETTER onto the table.

MORT (CONT'D)

What's that?

He slides it over to Mort with a dry smile.

JIM LANGAN

Something that really pops.

Mort takes in the LETTER. It hits him like a ton of bricks.

#### **INT. EMPTY STUDIO - NIGHT**

Like a gladiator in the stands after all the fans have gone, Mort roams the baron TV SET with a drink in one hand and the LETTER in the other.

He takes in the battle ground. This IS his home.

MORT

(presenting)

"Morton Downey Jr. The fuckin' idiot..."

KELLI (O.C.)

Dad?

Mort spots Kelli IN THE WINGS.

MORT

Hey, sweetheart! What are you doing here?

A sight for sore eyes, Mort HUGS her tight.

MORT (CONT'D)

Here. Have a seat.

She does. The only two on the SET.

MORT (CONT'D)

Does... Does your mom know you're down here?

KELLI

Yeah. She told me not to come though. She told me...

MORT

What?

KELLI

Dad. Did you make it all up? The attack on TV?

MORT

(defensive)

Make it up?!

KELLI

Look. I'm not mad at you for Stanford, okay? I can get over that if you're just honest with me right now.

MORT

Baby, I am so sorry about the tuition. I really did send the check. They must have just --

KELLI

-- I don't care about that. Please. Just talk to me like my dad for once without the loudmouth routine and tell me the truth. Did you make it all up or not?

Wrestling with himself, Mort looks Kelli in the eye and:

MORT

... No. I did not make it up.

She knows he's lying. And it kills her.

Kelli kisses him on the forehead and stands.

KELLI

Take care of yourself, okay?

MORT

Where are you going?

KELLI

Home.

MORT

Are you mad?

KELLI

Disappointed. But it's okay. I think I'm getting used to it.

She exits.

Mort breaks. Alone. On his TV SET.

He tosses the drink. Cries to himself.

A wealth of emotions rumbling to the surface:

MORT

(muttering)

I'm so stupid... I'm so stupid...

Stupid, stupid, stupid...

A dragging beat.

We've never seen Mort like this before.

Vulnerable. Broken.

Then:

CRASH! THUD! WHACK! He goes on a rampage.

Kicking a HOLE in the podium. Pushing over cameras.

Breaking his signature "LOUDMOUTH" LOGO over his knee.

Mort's Godzilla. And his set, Tokyo.

Destroying everything not bolted to the floor, he trashes the stage. His stage. The very place he called home.

**INT. MORT'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

We hear the POUNDING of feet as --  
-- Mort barges inside. Eyes red from tears.  
He grabs the PHONE and starts dialing.

**INT. WHITE HORSE TAVERN - NEW YORK, NY - DAY**

Drinking at the bar we spot Billy. Alone.  
He watches the wall TV on mute.  
Suddenly, a GIFT-WRAPPED CD drops in front of him.  
He looks back to see --  
-- Mort.  
Collar askew and a nervous smile, he holds up his hands:

MORT  
I come in peace.

BILLY BOGGS  
(re: CD)  
What's that?

MORT  
A very small part of a very big  
apology. Can I sit?

Billy SHRUGS as he unwraps the gift to REVEAL --  
-- "*Morton Downey Jr. Sings.*" With Mort on the cover.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Surprise. It came out today.

Billy sets his beer on the CD, like a drink coaster.

MORT (CONT'D)  
Okay. I deserve that. But just give  
me five minutes and then you'll  
never hear from me again.

BILLY BOGGS  
You told me three over the phone.

MORT  
Fine. Three. Deal?

Billy doesn't respond.

MORT (CONT'D)

Look. You were right and I was wrong. I've been neglecting you and everyone else ever since Lori came along. But we're getting married now so I'll have more time to focus on the show. More time to focus on the real issues.

BILLY BOGGS

Like what? The next Tawana Brawley scandal?

MORT

Exactly. And those social justice cases are a dime a dozen now. We can get a new Tawana Brawley. A new scandal that the Nation gets up in arms about.

Billy points to the bar TV. NEWS COVERAGE of Mort.

BILLY BOGGS

Looks like we already did. And it's you.

MORT

Even better! Because at least we can control it this time. Bump out the middleman and take it straight to the people. Let them be the advocates and drumbeaters for us.

BILLY BOGGS

You know, for a guy who broadcast character assassinations for a living, it's pretty ironic that you're sitting here - head blown open like JFK - and you don't even realize it.

MORT

What the hell are you talking about?

BILLY BOGGS

Five nights a week you went out on that little stage and told people what to think, what to feel and who to be angry at if they didn't agree with you. And now, the beast has finally turned on its master.

(MORE)

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

Making you just another guest on your own show. With no allies... no commercial breaks... and no one to stop them from eating you alive.

MORT

That's why I need you back, Boggs. You and I. We can tame this together. I'll even triple your rate. Your girlfriend's too.

BILLY BOGGS

It's too late for that, Mort. And we both know you don't have the money, so this one's on me.

He stands, finishes his drink and drops a BILL on the bar.

Mort grabs his arm. Desperate.

MORT

Billy. Please...

Billy checks his WATCH.

BILLY BOGGS

I heard a joke on the subway this afternoon. You got twenty seconds left. Want to hear it?

Mort just looks at him.

BILLY BOGGS (CONT'D)

What's the difference between Morton Downey Jr. and Tawana Brawley?

(beat)

One of them is a self-serving juvenile who created a media circus just to get attention. And the other one... is Tawana Brawley.

He PATS Mort on the back and exits.

Mort takes it in. A sad smile - knowing it's true.

**INT. LOBBY - MCA CORPORATE OFFICE - NEW YORK, NY - DAY**

Mort waits all by himself.

Nervous, he fiddles with another GIFT-WRAPPED CD in his hands.

ASSISTANT

Mr. Pittman will see you now, Mr.  
Downey.

Mort takes a deep breath and stands.

Leaving the CD on the couch, he moves toward the office.

Dead man walking.

CUT TO:

**INT. THEATRE STAGE - ONE-MAN SHOW**

MORT

(addressing us)

Cancelled the same day my CD came out. How's that for a cosmic "fuck-you." It got some play on college radio, mostly for the swearing, and then it washed out. Much like my career, I guess. Sure. I had another show a year later. Kicked around a few hosting gigs. But it wasn't the same. Nothing was ever the same after you fine folks stopped tuning in...

He lights up a smoke. His confidence magically renewed:

MORT (CONT'D)

But, hey, I'm just grateful for my time in the sun. Because while I never did get my name on the stupid walk of fame or become a rock star, I DID do one thing:

(presenting)

Change TV forever.

Mort LAUGHS.

MORT (CONT'D)

Don't believe me?

He pulls out a REMOTE and CLICKS on --

-- a projected IMAGE of:

**BILL O'REILLY.** And he's screaming at someone. On mute.

Then, CLICK. New image:

**BILL MAHER.** More screaming.

CLICK:

**SEAN HANNITY.** Finger pointing.

CLICK:

**JERRY SPRINGER.**

MORT (CONT'D)

In a few years, you might forget my  
face. Forget my show. Hell, you  
even might forget my name. But  
there's one thing you'll never  
forget...

CLICK:

**RUSH LIMBAUGH.**

CLICK:

**GLENN BECK.**

CLICK:

**TMZ.**

MORT (CONT'D)

That tabloid TV sells. And, baby,  
nobody sold more than me.

Mort flashes his patented GRIN. Holds it.

CUT TO BLACK.

Mort's song "*HEY THERE MR. DEALER*" plays over...

TITLE CARD:

**"In 1998, a Golden Star was dedicated to Mort on the Palm  
Springs, California, Walk of Stars."**

**"In 2001, Mort died due to complications from lung cancer."**

FADE OUT.

SONG CONT'D...