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# Breaking News

An Original Screenplay By

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A title reads: “Inspired by true events.”

EXT. THE BROADCAST HOUSE – DAY

The sun is beginning to set behind the Broadcast House, a conglomeration of brick buildings and tall radio and TV broadcast towers, as well as several huge satellite dishes, all surrounded by a white stone wall with a guarded gate. A sign on the wall at the front gate states, “WXYZ Channel 7, An ABC Affiliate.” Also located in Broadcast House, with a smaller sign, is “WXYZ Radio.”

The GUARD inside of the booth at the front gate is a forty-five-year-old black man in a blue uniform. He holds a walkie-talkie in his hand, and keeps sticking his head out of the booth to peer out at Ten Mile Road, a major thoroughfare filled with after-work traffic.

The serious male newscaster-like Narrator speaks again.

NARRATOR

On Friday, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1989, at 4:55 Eastern Standard Time, Detroit’s ABC affiliate, WXYZ Channel 7, is preparing for their nightly 5:00 PM news broadcast. The anchorman of the show is Bill Bonds, the number one local anchorman in the country.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

TV technicians wearing headsets with microphones sit at the main control board doing their jobs, preparing for a broadcast. There are ten small color monitors in front of them, and one big color monitor above the others. None of these guys wear suits and ties, they’re all in casual, but fashionable, attire. On one of the monitors is a slide with the show’s logo and the words, “Channel 7 Action News, with Detroit’s Number One Anchorman, Bill Bonds.” There is a photograph of Bill Bonds, a handsome, serious man of fifty-seven with a full head of thick reddish-brown hair.

Just beyond the control board and the monitors is a big window looking out at the hubbub occurring in the newsroom.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

There are a number of people on the set, either doing their jobs or wandering aimlessly killing time until the broadcast: set dressers straighten desks and backgrounds, cameramen (wearing headphones) smoke cigarettes and drink coffee while standing in front of their enormous 1989 TV cameras, production assistants dart back and forth for various reasons. The FLOOR MANAGER, a sixty-year-old man wearing a white shirt and a black tie, oversees all of the activity.

## INT. TV CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Of the three guys at the main control board, the man standing with his arms folded is DAVE, the forty-five-year-old director with thinning blond hair and a goatee beard. He pushes a button on a microphone.

DAVE

Camera one, let's loosen up a little bit.

At camera one stands a pot-bellied man, CAMERAMAN #1, busily drinking coffee and smoking a cigarette. He speaks into the microphone on his headset.

CAMERAMAN #1

If I loosen up any more—  
(he pushes a switch on  
the camera's handle)  
—you'll see off the set.

## INT. TV CONTROL ROOM – DAY

On one of the color monitors the view of the newsroom set widens out, revealing the wooden struts anchored with sandbags holding up the wall

DAVE

Right. Go back to where you were.

The shot of the set on the monitor zooms in a little and now the struts are gone.

CAMERAMAN #1 (O.S.)

See?

DAVE

I see. You're right and I'm wrong, so shoot me. Bob, you there?

Bob, the floor manager down on the set, speaks into his headset mike.

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

I'm here.

DAVE

Where's my talent?

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

Makeup. You want 'em?

Dave glances up at the clock on the wall. It's 4:55.

DAVE

Yeah, let's get 'em. I don't suppose you've seen Bill, have you?

FLOOR MANAGER (O.S.)

(guffaws)

Bill who?

Dave rubs his throat like it might soon get wrung. He picks up the receiver of the telephone and pushes a button.

INT. PHIL NYE'S OFFICE – DAY

A plaque on the desk reads, "Phillip Nye, News Director." PHIL is a tall, broad-chested, handsome man of fifty with dark hair that's graying at the temples, wearing a suit and tie and nervously smoking a cigarette. The phone on his desk rings and he answers it.

PHIL

Phil Nye.

DAVE (O.S.)

Bill's not here yet.

Phil looks at his watch. It's 4:57.

PHIL

What an asshole.

DAVE (O.S.)

He's never missed a show in ten years.

PHIL

He's a ham. He'd never give up a second of air time, but he's sure as hell cutting it close.

DAVE (O.S.)

Closer every day.

EXT. THE BROADCAST HOUSE – DAY

The Guard at the gate in the booth is still popping his head in and out looking up the road. And then he hears something. Yes, a car rapidly approaching in the distance, it's engine's RPMs

topping out. Suddenly a brand new, red, 1989 Cadillac Eldorado, with a white Brougham top, comes screeching around the corner, fishtails, leaving skid marks, then straightens out and comes racing straight at the Broadcast House and the Guard, who raises his walkie-talkie to his face.

GUARD

He's here.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave picks up the walkie talkie and keys it.

DAVE

(smiles)

Thank all the gods in heaven. Hallelujah.

GUARD (O.S.)

Amen.

Dave picks up the phone and pushes a button

INT. PHIL NYE'S OFFICE – DAY

Phil Nye's phone rings and he immediately answers.

PHIL

Yeah?

DAVE (O.S.)

He's here.

PHIL

Of course he is, the motherfucker. He just enjoys making us all squirm.

DAVE (O.S.)

Maybe it gives him that kick he needs to be good.

PHIL

Yeah? I'll give him that kick he needs, in the ass!

EXT. THE BROADCAST HOUSE – DAY

The red Cadillac screeches to a halt at the gate. The car window opens six inches and a waving hand comes out. The Guard pushes a button in the booth and the gate opens. The car is floored

causing the front wheels to spin – it's front-wheel drive – and burn rubber as the Cadillac rapidly enters the facility. The Guard smiles appreciatively, shakes his head and waves the burned rubber smoke away from his face.

EXT. NEWS BUILDING – DAY

A white, twenty-five-year-old security guard named CAL in a blue uniform with a walkie talkie on his belt stands in front of a plain brick building with his hands folded behind his back, a patient expression on his face. The red Eldorado screams to halt right in front of him. Cal steps forward and opens the car door revealing BILL BONDS, who looks exactly like his photo: handsome, fifty-seven, a full, thick head of brownish-red hair, and he's attired in an expensive suit and tie. He smiles up at Cal with his most charming smile.

BILL

Hello Cal, Bill Bonds has arrived.

CAL

You sure have, Mr. Bonds.

(looks at his watch)

And you're right on time, too.

BILL

(shrugs)

Of course I am. Nothing starts without me, does it?

Bill leans forward to get out of the car. As he does so he hits his forehead on the ceiling, knocking his thick toupee off his head revealing that he's mostly bald with wisps of hair covering his head. Bills gasps, as does Cal.

BILL

(horrified)

*Holy fucking son of a bitch!* It took me an hour to put that motherfucker on.

He reaches back, grabs his toupee and gets out of the car. Bill plops the rug on his head, then pushes it down, attempting to straighten it out. The toupee is slightly crooked no matter what he does. He turns to Cal.

BILL

How do I look?

Cal appears stricken and steps out of his way.

CAL

Great.

Bill enters the building. Cal grabs his walkie talkie and keys it.

CAL

Bill has entered the building.

DAVE (O.S.)

How is he?

CAL

He's good.

DAVE (O.S.)

Sober?

CALL

(hesitant)

I don't know that I'd go *that* far. But he isn't smashed.

DAVE (O.S.)

Well, that's something.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

All of the newscasters are in their seats—except the main, center seat that's empty—as the crew finishes what they're doing and vacates the set. Several newscasters cough, then take a drink of water. Everybody is ready.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave looks at both his watch and the wall clock. The sweep second hand moves toward 12. Dave points his finger.

DAVE

OK, ready on announcer.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

In a walled off corner of the studio is the ANNOUNCER sitting on a stool below a studio microphone on a boom. He's a seventy-five-year-old black man with a white beard. He speaks with a perfect baritone TV announcer's voice.

ANNOUNCER

Ready.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave makes the sign of the cross, then takes a deep breath. Everything he asks for we see realized on the many monitors. The newsroom set is visible through a glass wall.

DAVE

Fade in slide and music, cue announcer.

The technical crew goes to work, hitting buttons and sliding up faders. The slide we've already seen of "Channel 7 Action News" with Bill Bonds' face fades up, as does exciting, dramatic music.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The award-winning Channel Seven Action News at five, with the Channel Seven action news team, Doris Biscoe . . .

On the monitor we see a close-up of DORIS BISCOE is an attractive, sexy, serious black woman in her mid-thirties, busily shuffling the papers in front of her.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

. . . John Kelley . . .

JOHN KELLEY looks up and flashes his infectious, toothy smile.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

. . . Marilyn Turner . . .

MARILYN TURNER is a beautiful blonde in her mid-thirties (who happens to be married to John Kelley). She too shuffles her papers.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

. . . Detroit's favorite weatherman, Sonny Elliot . . .

SONNY ELLIOT is a sixty-year-old Jewish funnyman, who could've worked the Borscht Belt circuit. He stands grinning in front of a big map of Michigan.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave is watching the sweep second hand on the clock mounted on the wall . . .



INT. PHIL NYE'S OFFICE – DAY

Phil has the phone in his hand as he watches the newscast on the big TV in his office.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
. . . And Detroit's number one anchorman,  
Bill Bonds.

Bill sits down in his chair on the set, his toupee slightly askew, a shit-eating grin on his face. He made it. Again.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave lets out a big sigh and shakes head.

DAVE  
Ready on camera one? Go.  
(it goes to the wide  
shot of the whole  
action news team)  
That son of a bitch made it. Again. Un-  
fuckin'-believable.

INT. PHIL NYE'S OFFICE – DAY

Phil, watching his TV, hangs up the phone, shakes his head and lights a cigarette.

PHIL  
Billy. It's inhuman. You're a monster.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill Bonds takes the lead, and he's dead serious. He's a master at reading off the teleprompter.

BILL  
Good evening ladies and gentlemen,  
tonight's top story is: Soviet General  
Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev has ordered  
the last remaining Russian troops to leave  
Afghanistan after nine years of fighting.  
The Afghan-Soviet War, known as "Russia's  
Vietnam War," is finally over.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Everybody in the control room glances at each other in amazement, then shrugs and returns to work. Dave sums up everybody's feelings.

DAVE

What can you say? The guy's a pro.  
He's an asshole, but a pro. They seem  
to go together.

The crew all shrug.

INT. PHIL NYE'S OFFICE – DAY

Phil sits back down at his desk, flicking his cigarette ash into an ashtray.

PHIL

(sighs)  
Saved by the hair of your chinny-chin-  
chin, again. Someday, my fine feathered  
friend, your luck is gonna run out.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave points at one of the guys on his control team.

DAVE

Cue up the slide and music.

A slide on a monitor appears with photos of John Kelley and Marilyn Turner that says, "Kelly & Co., with John Kelly and Marilyn Turner, Weekdays at 9:00 AM." Dave pushes the button on the microphone.

DAVE

Ready announcer?

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Ready.

DAVE

Fade up on slide and music, cue announcer.

The slide fades in on the big monitor.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Make sure to watch “Kelly & Co.” weekdays  
at 9:00.

DAVE

Ready on commercial? Run commercial.

A commercial starts playing on one of the monitors. On the other monitors are shots of the whole newsroom set, as well as various close-ups of the newscasters, including Bill. Two makeup girls are attending to him, powdering his face and straightening his toupee.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

As the two makeup girls work on Bill he grins happily. LETITIA is a cute, black, 25-year-old girl and CHERI is a cute, white, 25-year-old girl.

BILL

Use all of your power, girls, you’re on  
a mission of God.

LETITIA

(powders him)

You look awesome, Mr. Bonds. You  
always do.

Cheri holds a can of hair spray as she maneuvers the toupee into place.

CHERI

The only problem with toupees is that  
they always look fake, no matter what  
you do.

BILL

This was very expensive.

CHERI

Even still.

Cheri uses a lot of hair spray.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

The phone rings and a male TECH sitting in front of the control board answers.

TECH

Control room.

(listens; hands the  
phone to Dave)

It's Phil.

DAVE

Surprise, surprise.

(takes the phone)

Phil.

PHIL (O.S.)

Is he ready for his commentary?

DAVE

Of course he is, he's Bill Bonds.

PHIL (O.S.)

Right. Why should I worry?

Dave hands off the phone, then pushes the button on the microphone.

DAVE

Bill, you ready for your commentary?

BILL

Does the Pope shit in the woods?

DAVE

What's your subject, if you don't mind  
me asking?

Bill straightens his tie and shoos away the makeup girls.

BILL

Life.

DAVE

Can't wait.

(Dave lets go of  
the microphone  
button and turns  
to his control crew)

OK, ready on slide and music, stand  
by announcer.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Standing by.

DAVE

Get ready Bill.

BILL

I was born ready. I float like butterfly  
and sting like a bee.

DAVE

(smiles)

Thank you, Mohammed. OK, fade in  
slide and music, cue announcer.

On the main large monitor we see a photograph of Bills Bonds, beneath which is the word, "Commentary." Accompanying this is dramatically urgent music.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And now, not only Detroit, but America's  
number one local newsman, the man who  
tells it like it is, Bill Bonds.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bills Bonds looks up at the camera dead serious, right into our eyes, and tells it like it is.

BILL

Hi, I'm Bill Bonds, and I'm going to  
speak my mind. Turn off those tele-  
prompters. I'm going to tell it like is.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave stands there with his arms crossed. He shakes his head.

DAVE

(offhandedly)

The teleprompters are off, Bill, you forgot  
to turn in your copy.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill takes a breath, then proceeds.

BILL  
My fellow Detroiters . . .

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave chuckles.

DAVE  
First thing a lie. Bill, you don't live  
in Detroit; you live in the suburbs.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill gets down to business.

BILL  
Do you take pride in being from Detroit?  
I do. Do you care about the city you live  
in? Of course you do. But do you think  
the city government cares about you? Do  
you believe that the city of Detroit is  
addressing *your* problems? They aren't.  
The burnt wreckage of our downtown  
buildings, still there more than twenty  
years after the bloody Detroit riots, when  
tanks rolled down our streets and buildings  
burned, reminds us daily of the sad state  
of affairs of our city's government. They  
don't care about us, the people, the voters.  
All they care about is money. Moolah.  
Graft, payola, kick-backs. Your hard-  
earned tax dollars flushed down the  
proverbial toilet, like so much . . .

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave shakes his head.

DAVE  
Don't say it, Bill.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill raises his eyebrows as he searches for the right word.

BILL

. . . poo. That's right, you heard me, I said "Poo."

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave puts his hands together in prayer.

DAVE

Don't break into *The Music Man*.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Grinning, Bill has found the words.

BILL

And poo rhymes with foo', and that's who we've got in charge: a foo', a clown, a cheap hood. You know who I'm talking about, Mayor Coleman A. Young. Godfather of Motown for nineteen years. For some of you younger viewers, that's your whole life. Living under a system of cronyism and graft. Well, until this city is run by, I don't know . . .

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave still has his hands together in prayer.

DAVE

Don't say white people.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill finds what he's looking for.

BILL

. . . *rational* people, we're all stuck living in the shadow of our violent past. But we've progressed, ladies and gentlemen, we're on the upswing. Sure, Detroit may be the murder capital of America, but that doesn't define us. Detroit is built on pride. Automobiles are built with pride. Detroit is the home of the automobile, therefore automobiles and Detroit are both built with pride. They go together. You see what I'm saying?

INT. PHIL NYE'S OFFICE – DAY

Sitting at his desk with his feet up, Phil smokes another cigarette and watches the news on his big TV. He doesn't look happy.

PHIL

No, I don't. What the hell are you talking about?

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill isn't sure what he's talking about.

BILL

You might ask yourself, what's Bill talking about? And what I'm talking about is love.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave lights a cigarette.

DAVE

Don't go back into *The Music Man*.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill is all smiles.

BILL

L-O-V-E. Love. It's made for you and me.



INT. PHIL NYE'S OFFICE – DAY

Phil flicks his cigarette ash somewhere near the ashtray.

PHIL

Don't start singing.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill points at the camera, getting serious.

BILL

I'm not going to start singing, I'm going to give you and everybody else out there in TV land a dire warning: if you don't step up and do something about the mess we're in, nobody else will. It's up to you: the old, the young, the rich, the poor, the pretty, the ugly, the pretty ugly—vote. Vote your conscience. And if you don't know your conscience, just listen to me. I'll be the conscience of Detroit. I'm happy to do it. Thank you, I'm Bill Bonds, and that's the way it is.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave wipes his sweaty brow and sighs.

DAVE

We made it. Disaster averted.

(he pushes the  
button on the  
microphone)

Good work, Billy. As usual, you nailed it.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill is grinning happily. All his fellow newscasters sitting beside him sigh in relief, then they all smile and start talking.

BILL

Yeah, I think I kicked ass. I feel good about it. I said what I meant, and I meant what I said.

DAVE (O.S.)

No question about it.

Doris Biscoe puts out her hand.

DORIS

Fine work, as always, Billy.

Bill grins, shakes her hand and squeezes tight.

BILL

Thank you, Doris. Your opinion means a lot to me.

She continues to hold on to his hand.

DORIS

(seriously)

Does it?

BILL

You know it does.

DORIS

Thank you.

She removes her hand from Bill's, stands and leaves. Bill watches as Doris walks away and nods. She has a fine figure. John Kelley and Marilyn Turner step up, entirely aware of the expression on his face.

JOHN

Cuttin' it close there, eh Billy?

BILL

I made it.

MARILYN

And that's what counts. Are you coming to Piper's Alley tonight?

BILL

Maybe later. You look sharp tonight,  
Marilyn.

MARILYN

(grins devilishly)

Ya think? You can always fight John  
for my affections.

BILL

(stands)

John knows that you love me more, isn't  
that right, John?

JOHN

You wish, lover-boy. I get the hot blondes  
around here. Why don't you go see what  
Doris is doing?

MARILYN

Yeah. She's got it bad and that ain't  
good.

BILL

(grins)

Doris is a great newscaster, a terrific  
person, has a wonderful husband and  
beautiful children. Can I help it if she  
likes me?

JOHN

None of us can help it, Billy. There's  
something really adorable about you,  
even though you're a dick.

BILL

Thank you, John. I appreciate that.

Sonny Elliot comes walking up waving his index finger.

SONNY

Billy, you *meshugana*. Just keep  
tempting fate, that's a brilliant idea.  
Bound to work out. You coming to  
Piper's Alley?

BILL  
 Maybe later.

INT. PHIL NYE'S OFFICE – DAY

Killing the main monitor with a remote control, Phil stubs out his cigarette, sighs dejectedly and stands. He puts on his sport coat and straightens his tie.

PHIL  
 (to himself)  
 I can't live like this. This situation is  
 unsustainable.

Phil leaves his office.

EXT. HALLWAY – DAY

Phil steps up in front of an office door marked, "Jeanne Findlater, General Manager," and knocks. A female voice from within is heard.

JEANNE (O.S.)  
 Come on in.

Phil goes in.

INT. JEANNE'S OFFICE – DAY

JEANNE is an intense woman of forty-five with short brown hair. She looks like a high school principal. She's the boss of WXYZ in Detroit. She too has a big TV in her office.

JEANNE  
 Hello Phil. What's up?

PHIL  
 We've got a problem.

JEANNE  
 You must mean Bill? The star of Channel  
 7. What has our star done now?

PHIL  
 Jeanne, he got here ten seconds before  
 broadcast, half-in-the-bag.

JEANNE

Just like he's been doing for years, and he's always pulled it off. The guy's a pro.

PHIL

His commentary didn't make any goddamn sense. Did you understand what he was saying?

JEANNE

Enough. Sort of. Phil, look, people love Bill. He's the most popular local newsman in the country. Part of his appeal is that he speaks his mind freely. Occasionally, incoherently.

PHIL

You mean drunkenly. Bill's drunk. He's about to blow it. Soon. I've known him a long, long time, Jeanne. This has been coming on for a long time. It's a disaster waiting to happen.

JEANNE

(shrugs)

Undoubtedly so, but in all honesty, Phil, isn't that a big part of Bill's appeal? That he's drunk and might blow it at any minute? Viewers tune in because they're expectantly waiting to see when it's going to happen.

PHIL

(hesitantly admits)

Yes. And I'm saying it's happening. Now. You and I have to do something about it, now, before he spontaneously combusts on air.

JEANNE

Huh. Like what? Pull him of the air?

PHIL

(unsure)

You could.

JEANNE

Yes, I could. But I won't. You want to call New York and tell them that you say, in your professional opinion, as News Director, that Bill isn't able to perform his responsibilities and duties because he drinks? Which all those hotshots in New York do a lot. That we should pull our top-rated guy off the air because he's tipsy? Really?

PHIL

(looks down)

Tipsy? That's a good one. Look, Jeanne, Billy's my friend. I've known him for twenty-five years, since we both started working here at WXYZ.

JEANNE

So? Go over my head. You're his good buddy. Call New York. I'll give you the number.

Jeanne reaches for her Rolodex.

PHIL

Hold on a second. Look, I'm asking you, as Billy's boss and friend—

JEANNE

*Whoa!* Bill. Or Billy, or whatever the hell you call him, doesn't like me. Never has. I mean, when I was head of programming, he treated me like a nobody. But when I became General Manager—the first female General Manager in the country—he continued treating me like a nobody, except now I was his boss!

PHIL

OK, not as a friend, then just as his boss, I'm urging you to do something.

JEANNE

Fuck him.

PHIL

Jeanne, you can't be like that.

JEANNE

Can't I? Why not?

PHIL

He's the star of the show. It's your show.  
You're biggest show, I might add.

JEANNE

(hesitantly)

So what do you want me to do?

PHIL

Talk to him.

JEANNE

(closes her eyes)

Me? Talk to him? Are you kidding?  
This'll never work. He hates me.

PHIL

I thought he treated you like a nobody?

JEANNE

He does.

PHIL

That doesn't mean he hates you, Jeanne.  
He treats most people like nobodies. You  
are his boss. Talk to him.

JEANNE

(hesitantly nods)

OK. But you have to stay here.

PHIL

No. You're the boss.

JEANNE

But you're his friend.

PHIL

I don't want any part of this.

JEANNE

Too bad. You started it. You came to me and said, "Do something." OK, fine, but now you're staying. And helping.

PHIL

Honestly, Jeanne, this your job, not mine.

JEANNE

Phil, I'll happily fire you before I'll fire Bill.

PHIL

I'll stay.

Jeanne pushes the button on her intercom and speaks into it.

JEANNE

Ask Bill to come in here, please.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

All of the other newscasters have left the desk. Bill sits there looking possessed, his eyes wide. The Floor Manager sees Bill just sitting there.

FLOOR MANAGER

Hey, Billy, what's up?

BILL

I've got it. It all came to me in a flash.

FLOOR MANAGER

What did?

BILL

Everything. It's like I was cold and God covered me in a shawl of warm white light. I'm now illuminated from within.

FLOOR MANAGER

Sure thing.

(listens to his  
headset)

Jeanne wants to see you in her office.



BILL

(paranoid)

Jeanne wants to see me? She never wants to see me. She hates me. Why? What did I do?

FLOOR MANAGER

Jeanne likes you, Billy. She just plays tough. She has to, being female and all.

BILL

Yeah? We'll see. Remember, I'm Bill Bonds.

FLOOR MANAGER

Who could forget?

Bill stands, straightens his jacket and leaves.

INT. JEANNE'S OFFICE – DAY

There's a knock at Jeanne's door. Jeanne and Phil look at each other with expressions of dread.

JEANNE

(calls out)

Come on in.

The door opens and Bill steps in. He closes the door and heads directly for a chair.

BILL

And to what do I owe the pleasure of seeing both of you? At the same time, no less.

Bill sits down, crosses his legs and looks around. Jeanne leans forward.

JEANNE

(hesitantly)

Bill, we've got to talk.

BILL

Sure thing, Jeanne, got any booze?

JEANNE

(flatly)

No, I don't drink. I think I've got some mouthwash in the bathroom with alcohol in it.

BILL

(smiles)

What flavor? I jest. What's on your mind?

JEANNE

Um . . .

Jeanne looks to Phil for help. Phil looks pained.

PHIL

Billy, uh. . . that was a great joke with the mouthwash, but it's not really a joke, is it?

BILL

(confused)

It's not a pun or a riddle, so it must be a joke.

PHIL

What I mean is, how goes the drinking?

BILL

Great. Couldn't be better. I'm joining the Masters tour.

JEANNE

You don't think maybe, uh . . .

BILL

Spit it out, Jeanne. What do you want to say?

JEANNE

Bill, you drink too much.

BILL

You don't drink, do you Jeanne?

JEANNE

No. It doesn't agree with me.

BILL

Well, I don't agree with you, either.  
You tea-totalers don't understand  
what it's like to drink. Anyone can  
*not* drink; it takes a real man to drink.

JEANNE

Does it?

BILL

Goddamn right it does. A man, Jeanne.  
And let us not forget, Madame General  
Manager, that I'm the number one local  
newsman in the entire country. Why is  
that?

JEANNE

(timidly)

Because you drink?

BILL

(furious)

No, because I'm Bill Bonds, that's  
why! Every molecule, every atom,  
every particle that it took to create  
me is exactly the perfect one, in the  
right place. Unique, interconnected  
and indivisible. You wanna know  
why I'm the guy they're looking at  
and not you?

JEANNE

Why, Bill, inform me?

BILL

Because God loves me more than he  
loves you.

JEANNE

That's a strong position, Bill, I will  
admit. Did God tell you this himself,  
or did he send an angel?

BILL

You scoff.

JEANNE

Sadly, of course, this is bullshit.

BILL

Oh, really? God didn't choose you, he chose me. I'm His messenger.

JEANNE

Yeah, and I'm God's messenger's boss, and I'm . . . *urging* you to limit your alcohol consumption, at least before broadcast.

BILL

Or what?

JEANNE

Or I'll have to call New York.

BILL

Uh-oh, now I'm scared. Go ahead, try and fire me. I dare you. The head honchos in New York know me, and they love me. I've met all of them, and they all drink. I've gotten drunk with every one of them. They love me. So do it, Jeanne, call them.

JEANNE

(sighs deeply)

I'm not calling anyone, Billy.

BILL

Don't call me Billy, you've never even liked me.

JEANNE

No, you never liked me.

BILL

(turns to Phil)

What about you, Phil?

PHIL

I like you.

BILL

Are you going to call New York?

PHIL

I don't call New York, Billy. I don't talk to New York, I'm not that high on the food chain. Personally, just from my perspective as director, I think you're doing a great job. You're knockin' 'em dead every night. I have no complaints.

(Jeanne looks at  
Phil like he's a  
traitor)

But, as your friend, I think you need to cool out a little bit. You're pushing too hard.

BILL

Thanks for the advice, Phil, I'll keep it in mind.

(stands)

Well then, if there's nothing more to discuss, I'm going to go get drunk. Phil, you are of course invited.

PHIL

No thanks, Billy, I've got to go home.

BILL

And Jeanne doesn't drink, so that just leaves me. Good evening, my fellow co-workers, I bid you *adieu*.

Bill takes his leave. Jeanne and Phil look at each other.

JEANNE

I'm just his boss, you're his friend. Do something.

PHIL

What? The guy wants to set himself on fire and is holding a can of gasoline over his head. What am I supposed to do? Ban matches or buy goggles?

EXT. NEWS BUILDING/ PARKING LOT – DAY

As Bill leaves the news building he encounters Cal the security guard.

CAL

Have a good night, Mr. Bonds. Your car's right there.

He points to one of the front parking spaces in front of the building and hands Bill his keys.

BILL

Thank you, Cal.

CAL

Good show.

BILL

Did you see it out here?

CAL

Well . . . no. But you're always good, Mr. Bonds.

BILL

(smiles)

I'm a humble man, Cal, but it's true. My show fires on all eight cylinders. It's a fine-tuned muscle car. A '70 Barracuda.

Bill steps up to his Eldorado, looks closely at the keys, finds the right one, then goes to stick it into the door lock. Sadly, he misses the lock and engraves a three-inch scratch on the car's gleaming shiny red finish.

BILL

*Oh, man!*

(rubs his finger  
over the scratch)

Well, it ain't new no more.

(he tries again and  
misses again)

Crap!

On the next try he misses again. This next time he puts his other hand on the car to steady himself, moves his face closer to the lock, tries again and the key finally goes in. He unlocks the car and gets in.

INT. CADILLAC – DAY

The interior of Bill's Eldorado is snazzy red leather. There's a phone mounted on the dashboard. Bill opens the glovebox, removes a silver flask and unscrews the top.

BILL

(shakes his head)

Fire me? Bill Bonds? You can't  
fire me, you stupid morons, I *am*  
the show. The people of Detroit  
care about what *I* say, and they  
don't care if I drink or not. Hell,  
they all drink. Everybody drinks.

(takes a slug)

Besides, I've got this all totally under  
control.

EXT. NEWS BUILDING – DAY

Bill's Eldorado burns rubber from the front tires – since the 1989 Eldorado was front-wheel drive – and goes screaming out of the parking lot.

EXT. THE VINEYARDS RESTAURANT – SUNSET

The Vineyards restaurant is a ritzy, expensive place with valet parking. The sun is just beginning to set, casting warm rays on building. Cars are pulling up and being parked as well-dressed, upscale people enter the front door.

INT. VINEYARDS RESTAURANT – SUNSET

About half of the tables are full and people are being seated. Waiters, waitresses and busboys scurry back and forth.

There is a small bar located within the restaurant, off to the side, with six stools. Bill is the only patron seated at the bar, his back to the room.

With a final sip, Bill finishes his martini. Immediately the bartender appears holding another martini with an impaled olive on a toothpick. The bartender is a burly, dark-haired Arab man named BASHAR. He removes Bill's empty glass, replacing it with the full one. Bill removes the olive and toothpick, setting it on the bar beside four others, creating a five-pointed star. Bill is seriously drunk.

BILL

Did I mention that I'm the number  
one local newscaster in the country?

Bashar has an Iraqi accent, but speaks English perfectly.

BASHAR

Perhaps. Once or twice.

BILL

People listen to me. I tell it like it is.

BASHAR

Yes you do.

BILL

So, Bashar, where are you from?

BASHAR

Southfield. Close to Eight Mile Road.

BILL

I mean before that?

BASHAR

I'm from Bagdad. The greatest city  
in the world.

BILL

(chuckles)

Bagdad? You'll excuse me, but what  
a shit-hole. Someday Saddam Hussein'll  
get his. Count on it.



BASHAR

(shrugs)

Saddam is a fly speck in the history of Bagdad. But Detroit is a hell of a lot better than Bagdad right now, I can assure you of that.

Just then a party of eight, middle-aged, black men and women, all sharply and expensively attired, enter the restaurant. Among them is the 67-year-old mayor of Detroit, COLEMAN YOUNG, with a debonair graying mustache. As the group is led across the restaurant by the head waiter, a hub-bub arises among the patrons. As the mayor passes by everyone turns to get a look at him. Coleman surveys the whole room as he walks, instantly spotting Bill. Coleman grins.

Bill and Bashar watch the mayor and his party's entrance. They both nod.

BILL

What a coincidence. I was just talking about him on today on TV.

BASHAR

I saw.

BILL

What did you think?

BASHAR

(smiles)

Bill, you're the man. You tell it like it is.

BILL

(smiles)

Damn right I do. Which rhymes with poo.

And then who should sit down at one of the six stools at the bar but Mayor Coleman Young himself. He's an intense person and he knows it, and takes pride in it. The mayor and Bill look at each other for a moment, sizing each other up.

COLEMAN

(finally)

L-O-V-E, motherfucker? What the fuck do you know about love? Everybody in Detroit thinks you're an asshole.

BILL

A trait we have in common.

Coleman points directly into Bill's face.

COLEMAN

Do not fuck with me, you prick! I'll climb down your throat and stomp on your liver!

BILL

(sips his drink)

You don't scare me, Coleman.

COLEMAN

That's Mr. Mayor to you!

BILL

Go eat your dinner, *Coleman*, your friends are waiting for you.

COLEMAN

Bill, let me inform you of something you may not know.

BILL

Please. I'd be delighted.

COLEMAN

There is only one King of Detroit, and that's me.

BILL

Is that so?

COLEMAN

Goddamn right it is. Berry Gordy thought he was the King of Detroit for a while there, but look at him now. He's just one more asshole in Hollywood making shitty movies. You see *The Last Dragon*? That's the worst piece of drek I ever seen. I want my money back.

BILL

(sighs)

I missed it.

COLEMAN

Well skip it. You see *The Wiz*? That sucked, too.

BILL

Haven't you got people waiting for you?

COLEMAN

They'll wait.

(chuckles)

Ya know, Bill, I've been dealing with snotty white motherfuckers like you my whole life. I mean, honestly, you think you're something special because you're on the TV news? Motherfucker, I make the fuckin' news! You wouldn't even exist if it weren't for me.

Bill finally takes umbrage. He slams down his drink.

BILL

(incensed)

The free press is every bit as important as the government itself in a democracy. So let me tell you something you Communist, mobster, son of a bitch: I still remember when Detroit was a great place to live; now it's a cesspool. Every year you've been mayor it's gotten worse. You're the mayor of the Murder Capital of America. Probably the world.

COLEMAN

I inherited it that way. I inherited a mess.

BILL

When I started at WXYZ, twenty-five years ago, we were the fifth out of five top markets. Now we're number one. Why? Me. Not because I report from a prosperous city. Tell me, Coleman, you may be the first black mayor of a major city, which is a great achievement, but did you ever consider using that power to *improve* the city?

COLEMAN

(getting angry)

*I have!* And I'll keep doing it, too! And no loud-mouth dipso newsman jerk is gonna get in my way either! I'll kick your sissy skinny white ass around the block!

Bill stands up and he's taller than Coleman. Bill is pissed.

BILL

Oh will you now, *Coleman*? You don't look so tough to me. I think I can take you.

COLEMAN

Do you really?

BILL

I do. But not here and not for free.

(raises his glass)

Cheers.

(Bill drinks his whole drink)

*Ah!*

Coleman pulls out a big wad of cash, peels off a twenty and stuffs it in Bill's shirt pocket.

COLEMAN

Have a couple on me, Bill. You just keep drinking the way you're drinking and everything will work out just fine. I've seen it a thousand times before.

BILL

You don't really think you can kick my  
ass, do you?

COLEMAN

Every day of the week, including Sundays  
and Holidays, including Kwanza and Yom  
Kippur.

(grins)

Stay well. Remember, health is everything.

Coleman walks away across the dining area and everyone watches him go by. He goes to where his friends are seated and sits down.

Bashar steps up to Bill.

BASHAR

Another?

BILL

Does a shark shit in the sea. Sure.  
Gotta stay in shape for the Masters.

Bill pulls out a pack of cigarettes and puts one in his mouth. Bashar is immediately there with a lit match.

BILL

(to himself)

Kick *my* skinny white ass? Like  
hell you will.

EXT. THE VINEYARDS RESTAURANT – NIGHT

Bill stumbles out of the restaurant, puffing on a cigarette and waves at the young white male  
VALET.

BILL

My car, *s'il vous pait*.

VALET

Coming right up, Mr. Bonds.

Bill's Eldorado pulls up in front of him. The Valet gets out of the car and holds the door open. Using one hand on the car to steady himself, Bill comes around to the driver's door, then drops heavily into the driver's seat, the cigarette dangling from his mouth.

VALET

Are you OK, Mr. Bonds?

BILL

Couldn't be better. I'm in training.  
Gotta make the cut.

VALET

I'd be happy to drive you home. I'm  
sure my boss wouldn't mind.

BILL

Kid, I drive better when I've had a few  
drinks.

(gives him the  
twenty from his  
pocket)

Here.

VALET

Wow, twenty bucks. Thanks.

BILL

That's what we capitalists do. We pay  
for services rendered, unlike, say, the  
Communists.

Slamming the door, Bill floors it, burning rubber with his front tires, zooming out of the parking lot, a cloud of blue smoke left behind.

VALET

(holding the twenty)

That guy's nuts.

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD – NIGHT

Franklin Road is a curvy, hilly, two-lane blacktop weaving its way through a wooded section of town. Bill's Eldorado is going fast and is all over the road.

INT. CADILLAC – NIGHT

Paying absolutely no attention to driving, Bill roots around in a pile of papers on the passenger seat. He finds what he's looking for at the bottom of the pile – a CD. It's Tony Bennett singing *I Left My Heart in San Francisco*. He slides in the CD and sings along.

BILL

I left my heart/In San Francisco  
High on a hill/It calls to me  
Where little cable cars  
Climb halfway to the stars . . .

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD – NIGHT

Bill's Eldorado is in the wrong lane, going ridiculously fast and quickly disappears from view. A moment later a Franklin police car pulls up and parks. A cop rolls down the window and aims a radar gun at the quiet empty road.

INT. CADILLAC – NIGHT

The car phone rings and Bill answers.

BILL

Red Eldorado, may I help you?

INT. KRISTINE'S HOUSE – DAY

Bill's intelligent, reasonably attractive, blonde, 30-year-old daughter, KRISTINE, speaks on a wireless phone as she busily prepares dinner for her three young kids.

KRISTINE

Daddy, are you OK?

BILL

Couldn't be better, hon. Why do you ask?

KRISTINE

I saw you on TV. You're acting weird.

BILL

No I'm not. I'm fine. I said what I meant, and meant what I said.

KRISTINE

Have you talked to mom today?

BILL

I think I had breakfast with her. It's hard to tell since she's not talking to me. Why?

KRISTINE

Oh, nothing.

BILL

Spoken with your brother lately?

KRISTINE

He's not much on answering the phone these days.

BILL

Of course, he's found the secret of happiness: drugs and surfing. What else is there?

KRISTINE

He's a nice guy, daddy, give him a break. He just hates working.

BILL

Surfing, what a stupid thing to do. It's a shame you can't surf on the Great Lakes. He could've stayed home instead of moving To L.A. and becoming a beach bum.

KRISTINE

If it makes him happy, what's your problem?

BILL

I haven't got one. I'm number one in my time slot.

KRISTINE

You're the man. I love you, daddy. But I worry about you.

BILL

They go together, worry and love. You worry about the people you love. Everything OK with you and the kids and whatshisname? Moby Dick.

KRISTINE

You're such an asshole. Yes. Me and the kids and Ishmael are great, uh . . .



BILL

What?

KRISTINE

Are you on your way home?

BILL

Yeah.

KRISTINE

I'll talk to you tomorrow.

BILL

Good. Call me. Love ya. Bye.

Bill pushes the button hanging up. He puts the phone back on the dashboard, attempts to take another slug and finds the flask empty.

BILL

Rats!

(he tosses the flask  
back in the glovebox)

Ah-ha! Boy Scout training finally pays  
off. Always be prepared.

Bill opens the center compartment, reaches in and comes out with a little airplane bottle of vodka. He opens the little bottle and drinks.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE – NIGHT

Bill lives in a very big, six-bedroom, two-story suburban house surrounded by woods. He pulls up in the driveway, gets out of the car, then stumbles and weaves his way to the front door.

BILL

Home sweet home.

He pulls out his keys and now goes through the same routine trying to get the key into the lock. His first try isn't even close.

BILL

*Oh, nuts!*

Suddenly, the door opens wide revealing Bill's wife, KAREN, an attractive, 56-year-old blonde with long red fingernails holding a Gucci carry-on bag. Bill appears utterly befuddled as he enters the house.

## INT. BILL'S HOUSE – NIGHT

Bill enters the foyer and finds two packed suitcases sitting there. He looks at Karen who has her arms crossed.

BILL  
Going somewhere?

KAREN  
Florida.

BILL  
It's not winter.

KAREN  
(challenging tone)  
Isn't it? What month is it?

BILL  
(stopped)  
September? November? Who cares?

KAREN  
The rest of the world cares, Billy.  
Everybody outside The Wonderful  
World of Bill Bonds cares.

Crossing the foyer to the living room, Bill takes off his coat, tosses it on a chair, steps up to the well-appointed, fully-stocked bar, and proceeds to make a drink.

BILL  
So what's in Florida?

KAREN  
A house. We own a house there.

BILL  
Ah. Are you taking a vacation?

KAREN  
No, I'm moving out, Billy. I'm going  
to live in Florida now.

BILL

Bold move after thirty years of marriage.  
You don't happen to have a reason, do  
you?

KAREN

Yes I do. I'm fifty-six years old and  
I'm retiring from being Mrs. Bill Bonds.  
It paid well, but there were no benefits.  
So I'm quitting. That's it for me, folks.  
I'm retiring to Florida with the rest of the  
old folks.

BILL

But what's in Florida?

KAREN

It's not what's there, it's what's *not* there.  
You.

BILL

So leave. Who gives a shit? After two  
weeks in the sun you'll be happy to come  
home.

Karen steps right up to Bill, face to face, dead serious.

KAREN

Will you listen to me, you stupid son  
of a bitch. I'm not coming home. I'm  
going to live in our house in Boca forever.  
I'm never coming back. Lawyers can  
discuss the details of this shit later. Right  
now I'm waiting for a cab. I didn't think  
you'd be home this early and I thought I  
could escape without a discussion.

BILL

Look, dear, I'm the number one . . .

KAREN

(finishes for him)

. . . Local news anchor in the country.  
Right. Got it. I know. But I don't  
understand what you think you're  
achieving at this point.

Bill considers this for a moment. He takes a drink.

BILL

Transcendence. I'm moving to a higher plane.

KAREN

(factually)

Bill, darling, you're the local joke, and the best part of the joke is that you don't seem to know it.

BILL

(getting angry)

You don't even know what you're talking about. You're full of shit. You don't know what it's like being me. Being Bill Bonds, my dear, is a full-time job. Twenty-four hours a day. It's an ever-expanding and all-consuming occupation.

KAREN

No shit. Well, my darling, Billy, let me give it to you straight. If you don't get help soon you're going to die. Probably soon. Maybe you'll even die on the air. You'd like that, too, wouldn't you?

BILL

(looks upward,  
he slowly stands)

Scoff if you will, but I have a purpose to fulfill. I have a greater destiny to achieve. God loves me.

KAREN

That's good because I don't. You said I'm full of shit? Just listen to the crap you're spewing. Not only are you not Mahatma Gandhi; you're not even on the fucking *national* news. You're just a local yokel.

BILL

(fuming)

*You bitch!* You'll be back.

KAREN

No I won't.

BILL

Fine, I don't need you. Go to Florida. I don't care.

A horn honks outside. They both turn and look.

KAREN

I didn't think you cared anymore. And sadly, Billy, I don't think you have a clue what you're talking about anymore, either. Your conclusions these days are horseshit. You can't see it, Billy, but everybody else can. You're a fucked up mess.

BILL

No, I'm a success.

KAREN

If you're a success, I'll take failure.

BILL

(snide)

You already have it. If you never try, you'll never fail. And since you never attempted to do anything with your life except wear expensive clothes, have attractive fingernails and toenails, mission accomplished.

KAREN

(seriously)

I tried to make a good family, Billy, and a perfect family life for you, Mr. Big-shot. Picture perfect.

BILL

(sighs)

And it was good while we had four kids. But when it sadly became only three kids, you stopped trying. You checked out.

KAREN

Yes. I failed. I was a good mother and housekeeper, and a social secretary, and even a photogenic blonde, but I still haven't gotten over Joanie's accident, OK?

A horn honks outside. They both look around helplessly.

BILL

I know. Me neither. But death is a fact, Karen. I hate it too, but it's still a fact. Your endless grief accomplishes nothing. We have three other kids, Karen, how many of them live within five hundred miles of here?

KAREN

(aghast)

That's my fault?

BILL

Karen, my dear, you're a drag. A bummer. A bad trip. Retire to Florida. Get a tan.

The horn honks again. They each grab a suitcase.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE – NIGHT

Bill and Karen carry the suitcases out of the house to the waiting taxi. A fat, foreign DRIVER gets out to help and immediately recognizes Bill.

DRIVER

(Slavic accent)

Sonamabitch, you're Bill Bonds!

KAREN

(to Bill)

Go ahead, Billy, tell him about your greater purpose. Tell him about your grand destiny. I'm sure he'd love to hear it. Hell, you're Bill fucking Bonds after all, right? Everybody loves you.

BILL

When you get to Florida, don't forget to use suntan lotion. You burn easily.

KAREN

Fuck you.

The Driver opens the back door. Karen gets into the car. The Driver closes the door and grins at Bill.

DRIVER

Bill, you tell it like it is. You understand the common man.

BILL

I *am* the common man! God, in his infinite wisdom, speaks through me.

Bill goes back into the house and slams the door. The taxi drives away

INT. TAXI – NIGHT

As the taxi drives away the Driver is still excited.

DRIVER

Bill Bonds. Wow! How big is that house anyway?

KAREN

It's five thousand square feet. It used to belong to a top Ford executive.

DRIVER

Big house for a common man.

KAREN

Bill Bonds is *not* a common man, I'll have you know. Bill Bonds is also not an instrument of the Lord, as he seems to think. Bill Bonds is nothing more than an asshole who is cruisin' for a bruisin'.

DRIVER

(nods)

Yeah, you're right, he tells it like it is.

KAREN

That's what I meant.

EXT. STOCKHOLM CONCERT HALL – DAY

The Stockholm Concert Hall is an enormous white marble building with five-story white marble columns in front. A crowd of people and paparazzi surround the building.

INT. AUDITORIUM – DAY

The auditorium is filled with high-class, well-dressed people. Decorating the back of the stage is a six foot gold coin showing the profile relief of a bearded man, and above his head it reads, "Alfred Nobel." Onstage there is a podium where a white-bearded SCHOLAR dressed in a black robe speaks in a dramatically theatrical voice.

SCHOLAR

This year's Nobel Prize for outstanding journalism is awarded to a man who has redefined television journalism, and by doing so is personally responsible for reinvigorating an entire major American city, simply by wielding the awesome power of investigative journalism. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the astonishing, erudite, unfathomably brilliant, yet always delightful, Bill Bonds!

Wearing a tuxedo, Bill steps out of the wings on to the stage, smiling bashfully as the audience bursts into enthusiastic applause, finally rising to their feet in a standing ovation. The Scholar hands Bill the award and shakes his hand. Holding the award to his chest, Bill speaks to the audience.



BILL

Nobel committee, fellow journalists,  
ladies and gentlemen. I truly appreciate  
this award, and from the bottom of my  
heart I deeply thank you . . .

(a dog starts barking.

Bill looks around in  
confusion)

Who let a dog in here? Well, anyway . . .

INT. BILL'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM – DAY

Bill is passed out on the carpeted floor of his living room. His toupee lies beside him like a dead cat. He's still attired in yesterday's outfit of dark pants, blue shirt and a loosened tie. His eyes are closed and he's grinning.

BILL

(mumbling)

. . . I'm honored. Thrilled. Although,  
honestly, not really all that surprised.

(the dog keeps  
barking; he opens  
his eyes)

Am I in Sweden?

(he realizes  
where he is)

Wait a minute, this isn't Sweden, this  
is my living room.

Bill slowly stands up. The living room is a mess. He walks directly to the bar, which is also a mess, grabs a bottle of vodka, then searches around for a clean glass. He finds a tall tumbler, for ice tea or lemonade, dumps its contents in the sink, then proceeds to fill it with vodka. It's a big glass and can hold about a third of the bottle. Then, performing a superhuman alcoholic feat, Bill drinks the whole thing down.

He stands there for a long moment with his eyes closed, feeling the alcohol enter his blood stream. Swaying, he grabs the edge of the bar to steady himself, teetering on the edge of passing out or throwing up or both. Finally, taking a deep breath, Bill opens his eyes wide and sings. He starts softly, but rises to a big crescendo:

## BILL

Mine eyes have seen the glory  
of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage  
where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning  
of His terrible swift sword;  
His truth is marching on.

(Bill marches  
around the room)

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
His truth is marching on.

He grabs the bottle of vodka, reaches down and picks up his toupee, then marches into the bedroom.

## INT. BEDROOM – DAY

In his boxer shorts, Bill sits on the bed humming the “Battle Hymn” as he lovingly brushes his toupee. He takes a big slug from his tumbler of vodka, then sets it down on the nightstand beside a black and white wedding photo of he and Karen, dressed up, smiling, and twenty-one years old. Bill sighs as he remembers . . .

A title reads: Detroit, 1963.”

## EXT. PENOBSCOT BUILDING – DAY (BLACK &amp; WHITE)

The Penobscot Building is a 1928 Art Deco skyscraper. At forty-seven stories, it was the tallest building in Detroit in 1963.

## INT. 1960s STUDIO – DAY (BLACK &amp; WHITE)

Thirty-year-old BILL BONDS is a tall, handsome guy, with close-cropped dark-hair, a black suit, white shirt, thin black tie. Bill takes what he’s doing very seriously, and always has an intensity in his demeanor and voice. He sits behind an old-fashioned turntable and a big microphone, wearing enormous headphones. The song *Sugar Shack* ends. Bill takes off the 45-RPM record and puts on another one.

BILL

(speaking fast)

That was the number one hit song again this week, *Sugar Shack*, by Jimmy Gilmer and The Fireballs. It's thirty-six chilly degrees here in the Detroit metro area, frost expected. I'm Boppin' Billy Bonds spinnin' the hits all hour, startin' off with *The End of the World* by Skeeter Davis, coming in at number two on the Keener top thirteen . . .

INT. SOUND BOOTH – DAY (BLACK & WHITE)

Young Bill is in a sound booth speaking in a deathly serious tone into a big old microphone.

BILL

Cuba has cut off the normal water supply to United States Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, in reprisal for the our seizure four days ago of four Cuban fishing boats off the coast of Florida.

INT. SOUND BOOTH – DAY (BLACK & WHITE)

Once again Bill stands in front of a big microphone wearing outsized headphones. Now we can see a black and white television monitor just outside the booth. On the TV screen we see the old Channel 7 logo and hear Bill's voice

BILL

We'll be right back after a word from our sponsor, Lucky Strike cigarettes. Remember, L-S-M-F-T. Lucky Strike means fine tobacco.

EXT. BURNING BUILDING – NIGHT

In early 1970s garish color video, Bill, now with long sideburns and dressed in a khaki windbreaker, stands in front of a burning building holding a microphone, speaking to a black, middle-aged female RESIDENT.

A title reads: "Detroit riots, 1967."

BILL

How do you account for all of this fiery mayhem? Tell us what you really think.

RESIDENT

I think the Detroit po-lice started this whole thing.

BILL

Why do you think that?

RESIDENT

Because I live here. The white po-lice are at war with the black citizens here in the city of Detroit. They started it.

Bill steps away so that now we see just see him and the burning building.

BILL

This isn't a riot; it's an insurrection. Let's call it what it is! Oppression is oppression and I find it deplorable. I'm Bill Bonds, here on the flaming, hellish streets of Detroit. My hometown, where I grew up. Burning in anger.

TV Monitor: the old black and white Channel 7 News logo of ABC in a circle morphs into the splashy color Action News logo.

INT. BATHROOM – DAY

Bill has his toupee on his head, correctly positioned. In his expensive suit and tie he looks good.

BILL

Hi, I'm Bill Bonds and you're not.

(Bill points at himself in the mirror, grins, then exits)

The truth it marches on.

EXT. THE BROADCAST HOUSE – DAY

The same Guard sits in the booth in front of the walled-off enclave of the Broadcast House.

## INT. JEANNE'S OFFICE – DAY

Jeanne sits behind her desk drinking a cup of coffee from a china cup, with a saucer. She looks at the telephone on her desk. Jeanne opens the top drawer of her desk and finds a pack of Kool cigarettes. Shaking her head, she shuts the drawer. She sips her coffee, then picks up the phone and pushes one button. It rings.

## EXT. ABC CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS – DAY

The American Broadcast Corporation's headquarters is located in Lincoln Center on the upper west side of Manhattan. It's a twenty-story office building with a sign in front stating, "ABC Corporate Headquarters." A phone rings.

## INT. FRANK FRANULLI'S OFFICE – DAY

A large luxurious office on the twentieth floor overlooking a panoramic view of New York City. FRANK FRANULLI is a fifty-year-old, high-strung, overly-intense executive with thinning hair, attired in a suit and tie, and puffing on a cigar that he doesn't appear to be enjoying. He has a wall of twenty-five TV monitors playing beside him. Frank speaks loudly into the telephone.

FRANK

What do you mean the show's about nothing? It's the biggest goddamn thing on TV and we have to have one just like it! Now!

(listens; gets angry)

I don't care if he said it's about nothing. He's lying. It's about a schnook Jewish comedian living in a low-rent New York apartment building with a bunch of kooky neighbors. This isn't fucking physics, for Christ's sake. Find somebody else and do the same thing! I want a treatment on my desk by the end of the day, got it?  
... Good.

(he hangs up)

Christ, what an asshole.

The intercom beeps. A FEMALE VOICE is heard.

FEMALE VOICE

Jeanne Findlater on line three.

Frank pushes a button on his phone. Suddenly, he's a calm, happy, reasonable guy.

FRANK  
(pleasantly)  
Jeanne.

JEANNE  
Hello, Frank, how are you?

FRANK  
Couldn't be better. WXYZ – Detroit is my favorite affiliate. From whence I only get good news and high ratings, unlike all of the other unthankful affiliates, who do nothing but piss and moan. So, what good news have you got for me today, Jeanne?

JEANNE  
(considers)  
It's difficult to put in a positive way, Frank.

FRANK  
Go ahead. Try.

JEANNE  
Well . . . Bill Bonds, as you well know, is the number one local newscaster in the country.

FRANK  
Indeed I do know. I like Bill. He's a great character.

JEANNE  
Yes, he is. No question about that. However, he's not at his very best right now.

FRANK  
You know when he was at his best?

JEANNE  
No, when?

FRANK  
About twenty years ago when he was in *Escape from the Planet from the Apes*.

JEANNE

Yeah, it was actually *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*. He's got the poster up in his dressing room. And yes, that was about twenty years ago. But now, well, Bill's in trouble.

FRANK

Bill's a helluva guy. He's been at it for a long Goddamn time, and has built up quite an audience.

JEANNE

He has. We have the biggest five o'clock newscast in our market.

FRANK

And you've got what kind of problem?

JEANNE

Well, honestly, Bill's got a problem.

FRANK

And so do you. I know you're new to your job, Jeanne, since I got it for you. You're the first female General Manager in the country. Bill Bonds has been cracking up for years, everybody's watched it, nobody's surprised, except now you're his boss. How bad is he?

JEANNE

He's a complete mess and he needs help.

FRANK

Well, it happens to the best of them, Jeanne. It's a long, hard bumpy ride. Bill tried New York and he tried L.A. He ended up back in Detroit where he's King Shit of Turd Mountain. So, what are you going to do about it? Or, put another way, Jeanne, when you just called me, what did you think *I* was going to do about it?

JEANNE

Uh . . . Pull him?

FRANK

Pull him? Our highest-rated local newsman? Every night at 5:00 PM Eastern Time, Jeanne, I've got a lot of choices I can watch. Every ABC affiliate in the Eastern Time Zone. And guess who I always end up watching?

JEANNE

Bill?

FRANK

Fuck yes. He's the best thing on ABC right now. He's the number one local newsman in the country.

JEANNE

(closes her eyes)

I know. He's told me. A few times.

FRANK

Well, he is. So? What are you going to do?

JEANNE

I don't know, yet. I just wanted to warn you.

FRANK

Consider me warned. The wrong decision could cost you your new job. But you have to do your job, as best as you see it.

JEANNE

I know. I was calling more for moral support.

FRANK

Do you mean will I back you if you make the wrong decision? No. You're on your own.

JEANNE

Thanks for the support Frank.



FRANK

I'm always here for you Jeanne.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

The whole Action News Team is present, seated in their proper seats: Doris Biscoe, John Kelley, Marilyn Turner, Sonny Elliot in front of the map of Michigan. The crew is doing their various jobs and makeup girls are attending the newscasters. Everybody is trying to make pleasant chit-chat, but they're all nervous.

Everybody keeps darting glances toward the center seat, Bill's seat, which is empty.

Sonny Elliot is attempting to keep everybody's mind off the tense situation. He tells everybody a joke.

SONNY

OK, everybody, just listen. One old Jewish man tells another, the secret of sex is rye bread. So the old man goes into a bakery and says, "Give ten loaves of rye bread." The girl at the counter says, "Ten loaves, it'll get hard." He says, "Give me twenty!"  
 (he gets a decent  
 laugh from the cast  
 and crew; he grins)  
 That's it, folks, I don't dance.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave the director stands in the smoky control room in front of his team of three guys at the board. All of the many monitors are lit up around them, showing all the angles of each camera. Through the big window the newsroom can be seen.

DAVE

OK. I've got everything I need, as usual, except the lead talent. The eternal question remains, where's Billy?

Phil Nye enters the control room and looks around.

PHIL

I don't suppose Billy's in makeup, is he?

DAVE

No. What did you and Jeanne say to him yesterday?

PHIL

Jeanne did the talking, I mostly just watched.

DAVE

Watched what?

Just then who should show up but Jeanne herself.

JEANNE

Hey guys.

All the men nod obsequiously.

EVERYONE

Jeanne.

JEANNE

Is Bill here yet?

Everybody looks at everyone else until Phil speaks up.

PHIL

Not yet.

Jeanne looks at the wall clock. 4:54.

JEANNE

Six minutes. Plenty of time. He loves his spectacular entrances.

(looks around)

Whose got a cigarette?

Everybody does and they all offer her their packs.

PHIL

I thought you quit.

JEANNE

I did.

She takes a cigarette from Dave and a light. She takes a puff.

EXT. THE BROADCAST HOUSE – DAY

The Guard at the gate holding a walkie talkie steps out of the booth, looking up the road. His walkie bleeps. He puts it to her ear. Dave's voice is heard.

DAVE (O.S.)

Anything?

GUARD

Not yet.

(just then Bill's red  
Eldorado comes around  
the corner at a safe and  
normal speed)

He's here. No shit.

(looks at his watch)

Five minutes early. What's he up  
to?

The Eldorado pulls up and stops. The window goes down all the way and there's Bill's smiling face.

BILL

Greetings my friend.

GUARD

(surprised)

Greetings to you, too, Mr. Bonds.  
Thanks for finally stopping. It's good  
to meet you.

BILL

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they  
shall see God. Blessed are seekers, for  
they shall be sought. What's your name,  
brother?

GUARD

Luke.

BILL

You see. Luke was an apostle.

GUARD

Yes, sir, he was.

BILL

(holds up his  
index finger)

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke, 14:11.

GUARD

How do you know that?

BILL

I attended the University of Detroit, a Catholic school. If we didn’t learn our bible studies the nuns cracked us on the knuckles with a ruler.

GUARD

Yes, sir, Mr. Bonds.

The gate goes up and Bill drives through.

EXT. NEWS BUILDING – DAY

The security guard, Cal, stands at the front door of the building. Bill’s car pulls up slowly, then stops. The car just sits there. Cal looks at the car, waits, then finally steps over and opens the door.

Bill looks up at Cal with a far off distant expression in his eyes. He puts his hand on top of his head holding his toupee down, then carefully gets out of the car, making sure to not muss his hair.

CAL

How are you today, Mr. Bonds?

BILL

I must make my ministry.

CAL

Right.

Cal steps over and opens the door to the building and Bill enters.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

The door swings open and Bill enters the newsroom. Everybody stops talking and looks at him.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Everybody in the control room silently looks through the window at the frozen newsroom.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill looks around the newsroom and smiles. He waves at the guys in the booth.

BILL

Bill Bonds is here everybody. Blessed  
be he who knows his work, for he is  
loved by God.

(the crew looks at  
him expectantly)

I mean, let's make magic, my friends.

The crew all look at each other, then back at Bill.

EVERYBODY

Yeah. Sure. OK, Billy.

BILL

"As the Philistine moved closer to attack  
him, David ran quickly toward the battle  
line to meet him. Reaching into his bag  
and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck  
the Philistine on the forehead." Samuel 17.

(everybody looks at  
him quizzically)

Let me rephrase that in modern parlance.

(gets into boxing  
position imitating  
Mohammed Ali)

"It will be a killa and a thrilla and a chilla  
when I get the gorilla in Manila."

The crew breaks into laughter and applause. Bill strides to his center seat with his arms over his head, then plunks his ass down in his seat. The makeup girls descend on him.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Everybody in the control room looks at one another, then they all sigh.

JEANNE

He seems to be in particularly good spirits today.

(to Phil)

I guess we got through to him yesterday with our little talk.

PHIL

(skeptical)

No doubt.

The Floor Manager steps up.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave looks at the clock, then speaks into his headset.

DAVE

OK, ready announcer?

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Ready.

DAVE

Cue up slide and music.

TECH

Cued up.

DAVE

Fade in slide and music, cue announcer.

The Channel 7 Action News logo with Bill's serious face fades up and dramatic music is heard.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The Channel Seven Action News at five,  
with The Award-Winning Channel Seven  
action news team, Doris Biscoe . . .

On the monitor we see a close-up of DORIS BISCOE busily shuffling the papers in front of her.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

. . . John Kelly . . .

JOHN KELLY looks up and flashes his toothy smile.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
 . . . Marilyn Turner . . .

MARILYN TURNER is the a beautiful blonde. She tosses her hair back as she too shuffles her papers.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
 . . . Detroit's favorite weatherman, Sonny  
 Elliot . . .

SONNY ELLIOT stands grinning in front of a big map of Michigan.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
 . . . And Detroit's number one anchorman,  
 Bill Bonds.

Bill is sitting in his chair looking down, mournfully, slightly shaking his head.

JEANNE  
 What now?

Bill suddenly sits up straight, smiling broadly.

BILL  
 Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.  
 I am blessed to come to you live from  
 Detroit, my hometown. And I'm here  
 tonight to clarify a falsehood. A falsehood  
 held by none other than the Mayor of  
 Detroit himself, Coleman A. Young . . .

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave watches from the control room and mumbles.

DAVE  
 OK, here it comes.

Jeanne and Phil stand there watching the show.

JEANNE  
 Bill, for God's sake what are you doing?

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill tells it like it is . . .

BILL

Coleman, you honestly think you can kick my “sissy, skinny white ass”? Really? Well that’s pretty bold talk and I don’t buy it. Mr. Mayor, I’ll take you on anytime anywhere. Just me and you.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave looks at his frozen tech crew.

DAVE

Did Bill Bonds just say he wants to fight the mayor?

TECH

Yeah, he did.

DAVE

Quick, put up the commentary Kyron.

The Tech hits a button and “Commentary” appears on the screen below Bill’s face.

Jeanne turns to Phil and shakes her head.

JEANNE

This can’t be true?

PHIL

(staring at the TV)

Billy, you son of a bitch.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill isn’t even close to done yet.



BILL

I think we're both about the same weight and height. It's a good match-up. And since we're both pretty old, how about say six three-minute rounds? We'll hold the fight at Joe Louis Arena and give the money to charity. March of Dimes, Easter Seals, something like that. Just me and you, Coleman. What'dya say? Let's see who kicks whose ass? My money's on me.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave, Jeanne, Phil and everybody else just watches.

DAVE

Cue up slide and music, ready on announcer.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Ready.

DAVE

Who knows, I just want to be ready in case maybe he shuts up.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill picks up his papers and straightens them out.

BILL

It's a good idea. Just me and you, Mr. Mayor. For charity. That'll be entertainment, folks. Thank you, I'm Bill Bonds, and I tell it like it is.

INT. CONTROL ROOM – DAY

Dave and the crew go back to breathing.

DAVE

You sure do. Cue slide and music, cue announcer.

It cuts away from Bill to a slide for "Kelly & Company."

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

Bill breathes deeply, still shuffling his papers and grinning. The show goes on around him.

Jeanne and Phil just stand there.

JEANNE

(flabbergasted)

Did Bill just challenge the mayor to a fight? At Joe Louis Arena?

PHIL

That's what he said.

(shrugs)

Hell, I'd pay to watch it. My money's on Billy, but you never know, the mayor might pull a knife or something.

TECH

You know he's packing. He'll just smoke Bill's ass.

JEANNE

Fellas, please, we're in a lot of trouble. You can't do shit like this. There are all kinds of FCC rules against this. Threatening violence against a state official. Who knows?

(to Phil)

Wrangle Bill into my office, and get PR started on damage control with the mayor's office.

Jeanne exits.

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

As the show goes on, the Floor Manager listens to his head set, then points at Bill

FLOOR MANAGER

(whispers)

Jeanne wants to see you.

BILL

(stands)

We'll set the fight up through March for Dimes or Amnesty International or Easter Seals. It'll be sensational.

Bill stands and leaves the set.

INT. JEANNE'S OFFICE – DAY

Both Jeanne and Phil sit in her office and both are both smoking. Tension fills the air, like the cloud of accumulating smoke. There's a knock at the door. Looking guilty for no reason, they turn toward the door. The door opens and Bill comes in.

BILL

Hey, did you guys, watch the show?

JEANNE

Of course we watched.

BILL

So, what do you think? We can set up the boxing match through some charity like March of Dimes or a Detroit-based charity for crippled kids, or something like that, what do you think?

Jeanne looks to Phil, waving her hands. Phil shakes his head.

JEANNE

Bill, you don't think you're really going to fight Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, do you?

BILL

Box, not fight. And yes, I do. We'll follow the rules, the Marquise of Queensbury, but we'll both hold back a little cause it's a show and neither of us are kids, so we don't want to *really* hurt each other. We'll just give them a good show.

(Jeanne and Phil both  
smoke their cigarettes  
without speaking)

What? Is there a problem?

(Jeanne and Phil  
remain silent)

What? You don't think it's a good idea?

Jeanne looks to Phil for help.

PHIL

Billy, why do you want to beat up the mayor?

BILL

I don't want to beat him up, not really. But he said he could beat me up. He told me he could kick my "skinny white ass." That's what he said. And I said he was wrong, and he is wrong. I'll kick his ass six ways come Sunday.

JEANNE

When did he threaten you?

BILL

At the Vineyards last night. In front of other people. He's lucky I didn't whoop his sorry ass right there in the bar. I showed restraint. But now we can do it for a good cause.

JEANNE

Bill, have you been drinking today?

BILL

Not like I'm about to do. Look, Jeanne, the mayor challenged me to a fight.

JEANNE

In a restaurant, where you and a few other people heard it. You just challenged the mayor to a fight on TV where everybody heard it.

BILL

(confused)

So what?

JEANNE

Bill, you've crossed the line.

BILL

What line?

JEANNE

The one you just crossed. You made a drunken asshole of yourself on TV in front of millions of people.

BILL

That's what I do every day. That's why people like me. Jeanne, darling, you're new at this, take my word for it, people love this shit. They eat it up. The ratings will go through the roof.

Helplessly, Jeanne turns to Phil.

JEANNE

Help me, Phil, he can't hear me.

PHIL

(patiently)

Bill, you need help.

BILL

(surprised)

To kick Coleman Young's ass? He hasn't got a chance. I'll take it easy on him.

PHIL

No, Billy, you need help with your drinking.

BILL

(chuckles)

I don't need any help drinking, I'm handling that just fine on my own, thank you very much. Soon I'll enter the Masters Drinking Tournament.

PHIL

This isn't funny. Billy. Look at me, watch my lips move, OK?

(Bill shrugs)

You have to go to rehab.

BILL

(aghast)

*Rehab?* I'm not going to rehab! Are you nuts? I'm at the peak of my form; the pinnacle of my consciousness; the veritable zenith of my complete utter total awareness of the cosmic truth. You just watch what the mayor does. He'll go along with it. He said he wanted to kick my ass. I believe him. I think he means what he says. He won't let this chance go. It'll be historic.

JEANNE

The mayor is *not* going to fight you.

BILL

Yes he will.

JEANNE

You know what? Maybe he even will. I don't care. That's not the point. Bill, will you go to rehab?

BILL

(angry; stands)

Fuck rehab, Jeanne. And fuck you, Phil. I'm fine. I'm great. And you'll see, when the smoke clears and everything goes back to normal, I'll still be Bill Bonds and you won't!

JEANNE

(stands)

Except, Bill, or Billy if you prefer, you're not the boss at Channel 7, I am.

BILL

No, Jeanne I *am* Channel 7.

JEANNE

No, Bill, you're fired.

That just sits there for a long heavy moment.

BILL

(laughs)

You can't fire me. I'm sorry, Jeanne, but you don't have the power to fire me. Male or female. Look, dear, let me explain, I'm the number—

JEANNE

(closes her eyes  
and screams)

*Shut the fuck up!* Will you just shut up with that number one local newscaster bullshit! You don't hear me running around all the time saying I'm the first female General Manager, except I am, and guess what? I do have the power to fire you. And I'm firing you. You're fired.

BILL

Oh, yeah? Let's call New York.

JEANNE

I already did. It's up to me. Frank told me I could get rid of anybody I want.

BILL

But he didn't mean me.

JEANNE

Yes he did. Specifically you. You're fired, Bill. Canned. Sacked. Out on your proverbial ass. Pack your shit and go home. As long as I'm in charge here you're never working in the news department again.

BILL

(to Phil)

What do you have to say about this, Phil? Buddy?

PHIL

I'm a spectator, Billy. Me and everybody watching Channel 7 News in the Detroit metropolitan area at 5:00 PM, where we happen to be number one. But as for me personally, as your friend, I think you need get help. Soon.

Bill's eyes are ablaze as he rises to his feet, his fists clenched in anger, his face turning red.

BILL

This is a conspiracy! You don't tell me what to do! Nobody tells me what to do! *I'm Bill Bonds, you assholes!* I take my orders from no man! I take my orders directly from God!

Bill storms out of the office, slamming the door as hard as he can behind him.

PHIL

(blinking)

He didn't take that as well as he might have.

Jeanne lights another cigarette.

JEANNE

You know what? Fuck him and the horse he rode in on.



## INT. VINEYARDS RESTAURANT – SUNSET

About half of the tables are full and people are being seated. Waiters, waitresses and busboys zigzag back and forth doing their jobs.

Bill sits alone at the bar. He finishes his drink and Bashar brings him another. Bill looks at his watch, then up at the TV set in the bar.

BILL

Bashar, have you got a remote for the TV? Let's see if the mayor has responded yet.

BASHAR

(looks at his watch)

News isn't on yet. I'll let you know.

Bill sips his drink and puts a cigarette in his mouth. Bashar lights it.

BILL

Many thanks.

BASHAR

You honestly think the mayor is going to do this?

BILL

You saw him challenge me yourself, right here.

BASHAR

I did. But I think he was just talking.

BILL

Yeah, well it's time to put his money where his mouth is.

Just then a beautiful, twenty-one-year-old, brunette in a tight blue, low-cut dress, stockings and high heels steps up to the bar. She is LANA and waves at Bashar.

LANA

Excuse me, I'd like a dry martini, please.

BASHAR  
Could I see some ID please?

BILL  
She doesn't look twenty-one?

LANA  
(offended)  
Well I am.

She opens her pretty little rhinestone encrusted bag, removes her driver's license and shows it to Bashar. Looking closer, Bashar smiles.

BASHAR  
Just made it. Happy birthday.

BILL  
Is it your birthday?

LANA  
Two weeks ago.

BASHAR  
On dry martini coming up.

BILL  
(raises his glass)  
Welcome to the Over Twenty-One Club.  
We party every day, and rock and roll all  
night.

Lana looks at Bill, but isn't sure what she's seeing and furrows her brow. She opens her bag, takes out a pair of glasses, puts them on, then her face lights up.

LANA  
Are you Bill Bonds?

BILL  
I am.

LANA  
You're the best newscaster in Detroit.

BILL  
(humbly)  
I've heard tell. Thank you.

LANA

I'm studying media at Wayne State right now.

BILL

Think of that. What kind of media?

LANA

All media. TV, movies, radio, everything. But I love broadcasting. I think I'd make a good newscaster. Maybe a weather girl.

BILL

Maybe you would. You have a lovely . . . voice.

LANA

I think I do. You wouldn't want to get together sometime and discuss it, would you? Show me some pointers.

BILL

Sure. What are you doing now?

LANA

(points)

I'm with Mr. Excitement.

She points at an older, well-dressed gentleman sitting by himself, playing with the silverware.

BILL

Is that your father?

LANA

No. And he's not my husband, either. He's a friend. Or a friend of a friend, actually. A business connection.

(she picks up a matchbook, takes a pen from her purse and writes)

My name's Lana. Give me a call some time. We'll talk about broadcasting and media and that kind of stuff. Gotta go.

She hands Bill the matchbook, then crosses the dining area toward the table where the man sits. Bill and Bashar watch her walk away. Bill holds up the matchbook.

BILL

She wants to get into broadcasting.

Bill puts the matchbook in his coat pocket.

Bashar aims the remote control at the TV.

BASHAR

The news is on.

The volume of the TV goes up.

On the TV:

INT. NEWSROOM – DAY

It's Channel 7 Action News and Doris Biscoe is now the anchorperson in the center seat.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

. . . The Channel 7 Action News Team,  
with Doris Biscoe sitting in for Bill Bonds.

DORIS

(very seriously)

Earlier this evening my fellow Channel 7 newscaster, Bill Bonds, comically challenged Detroit mayor, Coleman A. Young, to a charity boxing match at Joe Louis Arena. Bill, of course, had only the best of intentions. The mayor's office was contacted and Mayor Yong's response was, and I quote, "No way. Not in a million years."

Bill is crushed. It's like all of the bones in his body have melted. Bashar discretely removes Bill's empty glass, replacing it with the full one.

BILL

No? Not in a million years? *You chicken!*

(Bill downs  
his drink)

Bashar, another, if you please.

BASHAR

You didn't really think he would, did you?

BILL

Yes. I did. For charity. For fun. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

(looks around)

Where's my drink?

BASHAR

You drank it. Want another one?

BILL

Does a shark shit in the sea? Quick, let's see what the other channels say.

Bill aims the remote at the TV set and switches to the Channel 2 News. The anchorman is a handsome, young, dark-haired man, JOE GLOVER.

JOE

. . . Fellow Detroit newscaster, Bill Bonds, weirdly challenged Detroit mayor, Coleman Young, to a boxing match at Joe Louis Arena last night during his commentary. We here at Channel 2 spoke with area officials and no such fight has been scheduled at the arena, nor did they even know anything about it. When contacted, the mayor's office replied, and I quote, "No way. Not in a million years." Unconfirmed word is that Bill Bonds has been fired from WXYZ Channel 7. Also not confirmed, the presumed cause of Mr. Bonds' dismissal is thought to be a result of his ongoing, on-camera, struggle with alcohol . . .

BILL

I'm not struggling. I know exactly what I'm doing. The drink goes in this way, this piss goes out that way. What am I missing?

(he drinks his drink)

Bashar, another.

BASHAR

Maybe you should at least slow down a little bit, Mr. Bonds.

BILL

(dead serious)

Bashar, maybe you should mind your own business and bring me my drink. Pronto. Never forget, I know your boss.

BASHAR

(smiles . . . obsequiously)

Of course, *Mr. Bonds*. Immediately.

A moment later Bill's drink arrives. Bill raises his glass.

BILL

(getting sloppy  
and loud)

I'm Bill fucking Bonds! Here's to me. There are hundreds of newscasters, and thousands of TV executives, but there's only one me and I'm him.

He drinks.

EXT. THE VINEYARDS RESTAURANT – NIGHT

Bill stumbles out of the restaurant smash-assed drunk. He puts a cigarette in his mouth and waves at the young white male VALET.

BILL

My car, *s'il vous plait*.

VALET

Coming right up, Mr. Bonds.

Bill's Eldorado pulls up in front of him. The valet gets out of the car and holds the door open for Bill. Using one hand on the car to steady himself, Bill comes around to the driver's door, then maneuvers himself into the driver's seat, the cigarette hanging from his mouth.

VALET

Are you OK, Mr. Bonds?

BILL

Couldn't be better. Let me ask you something. Who's the most famous person in Detroit?

VALET

(thinks)

Uh, Gordie Howe? Al Kaline?

Bill drunkenly lights a cigarette.

BILL

Shut up. What do you know about it anyway?

VALET

(concerned)

Uh, I'd be happy to drive you home, Mr. Bonds. I'm sure my boss wouldn't mind.

BILL

Kid, I drive better when I'm drunk.

(gives him a twenty)

Here.

VALET

Wow, twenty bucks. Again. Thanks.

BILL

Spend it wisely, and may God be with you. Inshallah. Glory hallelujah.

Bill slams the door, floors it, burning rubber from the front wheels and goes fishtailing out of the parking lot, a cloud of blue smoke left behind, hanging in the air. The Valet looks at the twenty and shakes his head.

## EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD – NIGHT

Franklin Road is still a curvy, hilly, two-lane blacktop weaving through a wooded section of town. Bill's Eldorado is once again going fast and all over the road.

## INT. CADILLAC – NIGHT

Paying absolutely no attention to driving, Bill roots around in a pile of papers and CDs on the passenger seat. He finds what he's looking for.

BILL

Ah-ha! Johnny Mathis.

He puts the disc into the player on the dashboard. Johnny Mathis croons *Misty* and Bill sings along.

BILL

(singing)

Look at me/I'm as helpless as a kitten  
up a tree When I wander through this  
wonderland alone/Never knowing my  
right foot from my left/My hat from  
my glove/I'm too misty and too much  
in love/Too misty and too much in  
love . . .

The phone rings. Bill turns down the music and answers. It's the voice of his twenty-eight-year-old son, JOHNNY.

BILL

Cadillac Corporation, Eldorado division

JOHNNY (O.S.)

(laughs)

You think you're hot-shit with a phone  
in your Cadillac, don't you?

BILL

Sure I do. So what's on your mind,  
*dude*? Catch any awesome waves?  
Or do you need money for a new  
surfboard?



JOHNNY (O.S.)  
 (laughs again)  
 You're a barrel of laughs, dad, for a  
 prick.

BILL  
 So, what is it? You need money? I never  
 hear from you otherwise.

JOHNNY (O.S.)  
 No, dad, I'm calling to see how you are.  
 So, how are you?

BILL  
 Couldn't be better.

Bill goes through the process of lighting a cigarette. He has to find the pack, take one out of the pack, find a lighter, can't find a lighter, then uses the car lighter. This is all while he's driving and talking on the phone.

JOHNNY (O.S.)  
 Kristine says you're fucked up.

BILL  
 No more than you.

JOHNNY (O.S.)  
 OK, but see, dad, I surf; you're a TV anchor  
 man. I'm fucked up on Yuma Beach; you're  
 totally fucked up on TV.

BILL  
 You take all sorts of drugs, and drink, who  
 are you to give me advice? I'm your father,  
 for Christ's sake, I give the advice around  
 here.

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD AT 13-MILE RD. – NIGHT

Where Franklin Road crosses 13-Mile Road there's a stoplight. It's yellow turning red and Bill bombs right through it.

JOHNNY (O.S.)  
 Go for it, dad. I'm all ears.

## INT. CADILLAC – NIGHT

Bill is driving, smoking, talking on the phone and still listening to Johnny Mathis.

BILL

All right, I will. I don't like what you're doing. You're a beach bum. It was barely acceptable when you were twenty-two, but now you're twenty-eight, for God's sake. Grow up! Act like an adult.

(the car lights  
up red and blue;  
Bill groans)

Oh, dear God, not again.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

What is it?

BILL

The cops are pulling me over, again.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

No kidding? And I was really enjoying our father and son time together.

BILL

Smart-ass. I'll call you back.

Bill hangs up, pulls over to the shoulder and sits up straight. Glancing in the rearview mirror, he straightens his toupee.

## EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD/SHOULDER – NIGHT

Two cops get out of a police car. COP #1 is a thirty-five-year-old black man with big mutton-chop sideburns like Sly Stone. He's grinning like a little kid as he steps up to the driver's window and knocks. COP #2 is a white guy who stays between the two cars with his hand on his gun.

Bill's window slides halfway down. Bill acts as sober as he can.

BILL

Good evening, officer.

COP #1

You're Bill fuckin' Bonds. In person.  
What an honor, sir. Wait till I tell my  
wife, she won't even believe it.

BILL

(humbly)

Well, thank you, officer.

COP #1

I've been a fan of yours my whole life.

BILL

Really? Your whole life?

COP #1

Sure. You're the best newsman in  
Detroit.

BILL

(blushing)

I do try.

COP #1

Man, you tell it like it is.

BILL

Yes, I do.

COP #1

That's my policy too. So, look, Bill,  
you're in big trouble. You were speeding,  
ran a red light, and you stink like the  
Seagram's factory. How'd you like to  
get out of the car?

BILL

(his grins fades)

But I'm Bill Bonds.

COP #1

I know that and you know that, but  
how about you prove it. Let's see  
some ID and registration, please.

BILL

I know the Oakland County Sheriff  
and all of the Oakland County judges.

COP #1

(smiles)

Then maybe you'll know the judge at  
your arraignment.

Cop #2 steps up holding a pair of handcuffs.

COP #2

How about you put your hands behind  
your back there, Bill.

BILL

When did we all get on a first-name  
basis?

COP #2

Excuse me, Mr. Bonds, please put your  
hands behind your back.

Cop #2 takes Bill's hands, puts them behind his back and cuffs him.

BILL

(stupefied)

But I'm . . . I'm . . . I'm fucked.

EXT. STOCKHOLM CONCERT HALL – DAY

The Stockholm Concert Hall is still a mighty marble building with tall columns in front. A crowd of fans and paparazzi still surround it.

INT. AUDITORIUM – DAY

A crowd of well-dressed people fill the seats. Bill stands at the podium holding his Nobel Prize. Alfred Nobel peers down on him from a six-foot gold coin behind him.

BILL

. . . I'd like to thank my parents, who  
are dead, my wife who walked out on  
me, my kids who never call, and all of  
my friends that I never see anymore—

The white-bearded Scholar returns, steps up to the podium and snatches the award away from Bill.

SCHOLAR

Give me that.

BILL

(perplexed)

But you gave it to me.

SCHOLAR

But that was before you so royally fucked up your life. Now you're unworthy. Go sit down among the common folk. Now you are a common folk. Or, as your wife so euphemistically put it as she left you, a "local yokel."

Bill skulks off the stage, disappearing into the shadows.

BILL

I'm unworthy, I'm not special, I'm common . . . No, I'm less than common, I'm uncommon, no wait . . .

A title reads: "36 hours later."

INT. OAKLAND COUNTY JAIL/BOOKING AREA – DAY

The deputies in brown uniforms bring the newly arrested men into the booking area. They put them up against the wall, kick their legs apart, frisk them and confiscate everything.

INT. OAKLAND COUNTY JAIL/HOLDING CELLS – DAY

Prisoners in blue uniforms and orange sandals literally pack the cells like sardines.

INT. ONE-MAN JAIL CELL – DAY

In a ten-foot-square one-man jail cell Bill sits on an iron cot without his toupee. He is dressed in a blue jail uniform emblazoned with "Oakland County Jail" down the side of the pants. On his feet are orange plastic sandals. He hasn't shaved in two days, nor has he had a drink. His whole body is trembling, he's sweating and his hands are shaking.

BILL

(mumbles)

I sure could use a drink right about now. Yep, no doubt about it. How about somebody get me outta here.

A female DEPUTY in a brown uniform unlocks the door. A 35-year-old black woman in civilian clothes enters holding a clipboard. She is LETITIA. She takes out a pen, looks at her clipboard, then looks up at Bill and smiles.

LETITIA

If it isn't Mr. Bill Bonds himself. It's a pleasure to meet you, sir.

(she reaches out and shakes Bill's trembling hand)

I'm Letitia Howard from the Oakland County Probation Department. I need to ask you a few questions.

BILL

(curt)

I've got a few questions first. Is somebody trying to get me out of here?

LETITIA

Yes. You'll be out soon. That's why I'm here. What are your plans once you're out?

BILL

Honestly, Letitia, and you do want me to be honest, don't you?

LETITIA

Certainly.

BILL

Good. As soon as I get out of here I'm going to get shit-faced drunk.

LETITIA

You can't think that way, Mr. Bonds. You have to deal with your problem, and I'm here to help you.

BILL

My problem is that there's no booze in here. I suggest putting in a bar.

LETITIA

That's stinking thinking, Mr. Bonds. Do you know what your blood alcohol level was?

BILL

No, what was it?

LETITIA

Point-three-seven. The legal limit is point-o-eight.

BILL

So where does that put me?

LETITIA

In jail. That's nearly five times over the limit, Mr. Bonds. That's enough alcohol to kill some people, and most small animals.

BILL

(proud)

But not me.

LETITIA

Do you think you have a problem with alcohol?

BILL

No.

Letitia writes on the paper on the clipboard. She puts her pen down, then looks straight at Bill.

LETITIA

I watch you on television, Bill. I have for years. You can't seriously believe that you don't have *some* problem with alcohol? Really?

BILL  
(seriously)  
No, I've got it under control.

LETITIA  
(amused)  
Do you now?

BILL  
Well, OK, I shouldn't drink when I  
drive. That's a problem. I admit it.

LETITIA  
Well, then you do have a problem?

BILL  
(hesitantly)  
OK, yes. One.

LETITIA  
(nods)  
Have you ever experienced trauma?

BILL  
What has that got to do with the price  
of wheat in China?

LETITIA  
You lost your daughter, Joanne, in a  
car accident when she was just eighteen  
years old?

BILL  
Yes.

LETITIA  
Is that when you started to drink?

BILL  
(laughs)  
Letitia, my dear, I started drinking in  
the 1940s, long before you were born.  
The untimely death of my beloved  
daughter, Joanie, was a terrible tragedy,  
but it didn't cause me to drink. I just  
continued to drink.



LETITIA

I'm going to recommend alcohol counseling when you get out.

BILL

Counseling sounds great, I could use somebody to talk to, just get me out here.

The Deputy opens the door and speaks to Bill.

DEPUTY

Your lawyer and wife are here.

BILL

(surprised)

My wife? Will wonders never cease.

LETITIA

The Probation Department will be contacting you, Mr. Bonds.

BILL

I can't wait.

LETITIA

And stop the stinking thinking.

BILL

No, never. There will no longer be stink on my think.

Bill stands and leaves the cell.

EXT. OAKLAND COUNTY JAIL – DAY

The jail is a plain brick building, just like all of the other municipal buildings surrounding it. Bill steps outside in his wrinkled suit, no toupee, the sides of his hair mussed, two days of beard, no tie around his neck or laces in his shoes. He holds a fat manila envelope in his shaking hand.

A handsome, well-dressed, middle-aged man, gray at the temples, with a graying mustache, named MITCH, steps up and shakes Bill's hand.

MITCH

You're free, Bill.

BILL

Thank God.

MITCH

No, thank me.

BILL

OK, thank you, Mitch.

MITCH

First time in jail?

BILL

Yeah. It sucks. I didn't like it.

MITCH

You're not supposed to like it. It ain't three hots and a cot, my friend. They don't want you back. So I paid your bail, and your court date is in two weeks, but I can get it pushed back if you want. You've been assigned a good judge; he and I go way back. This is your first offense, so you'll probably be OK.

BILL

Is it all over the news?

MITCH

Of course it is, you're a star. That's why I'm here so early. Get you out of here before the press knows what's happening.

BILL

The deputy said my wife was here.

MITCH

No, not your wife. That woman in that car there.

Mitch points at a car parked at the curb. Bills walks over to the car. The driver's window goes down and it's Jeanne Findlater.

JEANNE

Hello Bill.

BILL

Jeanne. What brings you here?

JEANNE

I always stop by Oakland County Jail on my way to work. Check if any of the cast or crew got locked up the night before. Good thing I did huh? Need a ride home?

BILL

My lawyer would have taken me, I guess, but I'll go with you.

(to Mitch)

I'll talk to you tomorrow.

MITCH

(waves)

Get some rest, you look like you need it.

Bill gets into Jeanne's car.

INT. JEANNE'S CAR – DAY

Bill blearily looks around the car, holding his manila envelope. He opens the envelope, turns it upside down and dumps out his toupee, wallet, keys, a pack of cigarettes and a pack of matches.

BILL

That's what I'm looking for.

He opens the pack and offers it to Jeanne.

JEANNE

Actually, I'd quit for three months, then I just started again yesterday. Thanks to you.

She takes a cigarette and so does Bill. He lights a match and lights her cigarette, then his own. They both inhale. He savors the smoke, then blows it out.

BILL

Well that experience sucked.

JEANNE

It's supposed to.

BILL

That's what I hear. I'll tell you another thing of which I'm certain.

JEANNE

What?

BILL

I need a drink.

JEANNE

You're still not going to quit?

BILL

(chuckles)

I can't.

JEANNE

Yes you can.

BILL

No I can't. I've never not drank. I have no idea what it would be like to not drink. What would I do with my hands? Where would I go after work? It doesn't make sense.

JEANNE

I just want you to know that we're not bailing out on you at Channel 7. You're an institution.

BILL

Can I have my job back?

JEANNE

No. You can't do the news at Channel 7 anymore. Maybe CBS or NBC will still let you do the news, but I doubt it.

BILL

So what's left?

## EXT. BILL'S HOUSE – DAY

Jeanne's car pulls up in front of Bill's house.

JEANNE

Talk shows. You've got an audience.  
Morning, afternoon, evening, say anything  
you want, nobody cares. Not on a talk  
show anymore.

BILL

Is that so? I'll think about it.

JEANNE

Good luck, Bill. I mean it.

BILL

Thanks, Jeanne. And thanks for the  
ride.

## INT. BILL'S HOUSE – NIGHT

As Bill enters his house he finds it dark, empty and quiet. He turns on some lights, then crosses the foyer to the living room, going straight to the bar. He inspects the mess, which includes three empty vodka bottles.

BILL

I'm out of bloody vodka. Catastrophe.

Bill grabs a bottle of whiskey and a glass. As he heads across the living room he grabs the wireless telephone. He steps up to the sliding glass doors out to the back patio. Bill, turns on the lights and goes outside.

## EXT. BILL'S HOUSE/BACK PATIO – NIGHT

Bill seats himself on a chaise lounge on the back patio and sets everything down on the table beside it. There's an Olympic-sized swimming pool, illuminated from below, and it's a big fancy backyard. Bill pours himself a glass full of whiskey and drinks it all down. He repeats the process. He fills the glass a third time, but only takes a sip. He pants for air. Dumping out the manila envelope he finds his toupee, keys, wallet, belt, shoelaces, a pack of cigarettes and a pack of matches.

BILL

Ah-ha.

He takes out a cigarette and his hands are really shaking. Lighting the match isn't easy, but somehow he gets it done. Getting the flame to the cigarette is its own ordeal. He gets the cigarette lit and takes a big puff.

BILL

What am I going to do? She doesn't think anybody will let me do the news anymore.

(takes a drink)

Talk shows? I hate talk shows.

(takes another drink  
and grimaces)

And I hate whiskey, too.

Bill picks up the phone and pushes two buttons. The voice of the CLERK is heard.

CLERK (O.S.)

Bottle and basket.

BILL

Hello, Jimmy? It's Bill Bonds.

CLERK (O.S.)

Hello Mr. Bonds. I saw you on the News. My money's on you. You'll kick Mayor Young's ass. But be careful, he might pull a switchblade.

BILL

Thanks. He might. Or a crowbar. Send over a case of Absolut vodka, if you please.

CLERK (O.S.)

Sure thing, Mr. Bonds. Within the hour.

BILL

Good work, Jimmy. The faster the better. This is an emergency.

CLERK (O.S.)

Make sure to keep him out at the end of your jab.

BILL

I'll will. And body shots, too. They pay dividends later.

(Bill hangs up)

OK, my biggest problem is solved.

(he takes a sip  
of whiskey and  
winces)

How do people drink this shit? There's gotta be some of those little airplane bottles of vodka somewhere. I've been on too many flights.

INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY

Bill has completely ripped through the bar and most of the cupboards, pulling everything out. He now he brings a chair to the bar, unsteadily steps up on it, catching his balance by hanging on to the wall, and starts digging through the top cupboard. He finds shot glasses, swizzle sticks, drink glasses that say "Playboy Club" and "WXYZ, Christmas, 1966."

Bill reaches way into the back of the cupboard and comes out with a black and white Polaroid photograph. The picture is of Bill thirty years earlier, when he was twenty-seven, wearing a white shirt and dark tie, and looking down at a swaddled newborn infant in his arms. He turns to the photo over and written in pen is: "Joanne, 12 ½ hours old, Aug. 12, 1956."

Bill sits down in the living room holding the photo while drinking a little airplane bottle of gin. His expression says, gin is better than whiskey, but still sucks. He takes a last look at the picture, then puts it in his shirt pocket.

BILL

(whispers)

Joanie, you were my favorite. Everybody knew it. We didn't hide it.

(finishing the gin,  
Bill cracks open a  
little bottle of Baily's  
Irish Cream and  
Drinks it all down)

Mmm, sweet.

(he takes off his  
jacket)

Wait a minute.

(continued)

BILL (cont.)

(he reaches into  
his jacket pocket  
and takes out a  
matchbook)

What have we here? Lana, student of  
media and broadcasting.

(finishing the  
Baily's, he opens  
and drinks a little  
bottle of Jagermeister)

Media and broadcasting are my  
specialties. And, as of late, I just  
happen to be single.

Bill looks at the matchbook, tries several distances from his face for focus, finds one, then dials the phone. It rings twice, then is answered by Lana.

LANA (O.S.)

Hello?

BILL

Hello Lana, Bill Bonds here.

LANA (O.S.)

I just knew I'd hear from you, Bill. I  
could tell. I got your vibe.

BILL

(sly)

Perhaps I was *broadcasting* my vibe.

LANA (O.S.)

Yes, and I *received* it. So what can I  
do for you, Bill Bonds?

BILL

I thought you might like to get together  
and discuss media, and its many applications.

LANA (O.S.)

I'd love to. When?

BILL

How about now?



LANA (O.S.)

OK. I can't wait. I think you're really handsome.

BILL

(grins and blushes)

Really? Thanks.

He reaches for his toupee and plops it on his head.

LANA (O.S.)

And smart. You seem to know everything.

BILL

Not everything, I assure you.

LANA (O.S.)

So, how does a thousand dollars sound?

BILL

(confused)

For what?

LANA

For me, silly.

There's a heavy moment of silence.

BILL

(realizes)

Oh. Right. Of course. What was I thinking?

LANA (O.S.)

That's OK. I *am* a student of media and broadcasting at Wayne. Is a thousand too much? I heard you got fired.

BILL

Yeah. I did.

LANA (O.S.)

I'll make it five hundred for you, Bill, because you're a star.

BILL

(sighs)

Yeah, a big star. But not like Gordie Howe or Al Kaline. I'll call you back, Lana. I've got your number.

(Bill hangs up)

I honestly thought she liked me.

(takes another  
shaky drink)

Fire me? *I am* Channel 7. *I am* Detroit. They'll all come sniveling back to me.

(the doorbell rings)

*Ah-ha!* Karen. I knew you'd come back. And you forgot your keys, too, you dumb bitch.

Bill opens the front door to find Jimmy, the clerk from the liquor store, standing there holding a heavy cardboard box marked Absolut.

CLERK

Hello, Mr. Bonds. I told my boss you called, and he said that he heard on TV last night that Mayor Young won't fight you. Not in a million years.

BILL

Chicken-shit, wimp. I'll hit that son of a bitch so hard when he stops rolling his clothes'll be out of style. Hang on.

(Bill gets his wallet)

Here.

Bill gives Jimmy a twenty.

CLERK

Thanks a lot, Mr. Bonds. You're the best. I'd bet on you, if there were a fight, that is.

BILL

Thanks.

Jimmy leaves. Bill grabs a bottle of vodka from the case, opens the bottle—fuck the glass—and takes a big gulp. Yeah, that's the stuff.

BILL

That's an improvement. Vodka's way better than whiskey.

Then he vomits all over the bar, the wall, the mirror behind the bar, and down his front. Falling to his knees, Bill continues to vomit and retch. When he's done, he sits on the floor with his back to the bar fridge, still holding the bottle of vodka. Wiping his face with his hand, he takes a drink. Vomit drips down the bar cabinets behind him, his chin and all over his face and shirt.

BILL

(thoughtfully)

Well fuck me sideways. I think I think I've hit the rock bottom, but you never know about these things.

(the doorbell rings)

*Ah-ha!* Karen, you bitch, I knew you'd be back and I knew you'd forget your keys, too.

Bill gets to his feet, drags his weary ass across the living room to the front door and opens it wide.

To Bill's great surprise there stands Mayor Coleman Young wearing a spiffy suit and tie, looking dapper and deathly serious. A chauffeur-driven Cadillac limo sits idling in the driveway behind him. Bill is dumbfounded.

BILL

Mayor Coleman A. Young? Well shit in my cap and where it backwards.

COLEMAN

(tough)

You wanna fight me, motherfucker?

Bill considers this and takes another drink.

BILL

I don't want to hurt you.

COLEMAN

You think you can hurt me? Go for it, tough guy.

Bill drinks his drink, then shakes his head.

BILL

No. I don't want to fight. L-O-V-E.

COLEMAN

Then why did you challenge me to a fight on TV?

BILL

(with a snotty attitude)

Uh, no, Mr. Mayor, you challenged *me* to a fight at the Vineyards the other night. I was just responding to your challenge.

COLEMAN

You took that shit seriously?

BILL

(nods)

Yeah, I did.

COLEMAN

(laughs)

Really? I didn't say I wanted to fight you, Bill, I said I could kick your skinny white ass. One is a challenge, the other is a statement of fact.

BILL

(belligerent)

Yeah? Well, I challenge your statement. Either way it's bullshit. You can't kick *my* skinny white ass, cause I'm gonna kick your ass, skinny, fat, white or black, around the block!

COLEMAN

You're just looking for a fight, Bill. Not with me, with anybody. And you said we were about the same weight and age? Are you nuts?

BILL

What do you weigh?

COLEMAN

I weigh one-seventy-five on a good day.  
How about you?

BILL

(coughs)

One-ninety, one-ninety-five. I haven't  
checked lately.

COLEMAN

Bill, fess up, you're two-hundred anyway,  
and that makes you a heavyweight. You  
should fight Mike Tyson or Evander  
Holyfield. How old are you?

BILL

Fifty-seven.

COLEMAN

Bill, hello, I'm seventy-four years old,  
motherfucker. I'm way the hell older  
than you, what are you thinking?

(smiles)

I realize that I've kept much of my youth-  
ful zest and vigor, and that's due to clean  
living. And that's why I know I can still  
kick your skinny white ass.

BILL

Right. Well I'll kick your ass right  
now.

COLEMAN

(lowers his head)

You're a scrappy white motherfucker,  
Bill, I'll give you that. OK, Bill . . .  
I'm going to do something that I don't  
often do. You paying attention?

(looks up at Bill)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.  
But you'd just dissed me on TV and I  
didn't like it. It pissed me off.

BILL

So then why didn't you take the fight?  
We could've made a fun thing out of it,  
then goofed around in the ring, at Joe  
Louis Arena, for Christ's sake. It would  
have been spectacular.

COLEMAN

(seriously)

Bill, are you tripping? I'm the fucking  
mayor, not Sugar Ray Robinson. You're  
a newsman, not Jake LaMotta. We don't  
fight at Joe Louis Arena. We're spectators.

BILL

So then why did you come here tonight,  
Mr. Mayor? To kick my ass? Or to  
apologize?

COLEMAN

Neither. You just get home from jail?

BILL

Yeah, I did.

COLEMAN

How you like it?

BILL

I didn't.

COLEMAN

Well, I know what you need.

He turns around to his limo and waves his hand.

BILL

Ah-ha. Sending for back up?

COLEMAN

You are one paranoid motherfucker,  
Bill.

BILL

I know your tactics. You eliminate  
your opponents.

COLEMAN

Bill, you don't know shit about me. And if you don't know your opponent you're always going to lose.

A handsome young black man in a suit and tie, the mayor's assistant, gets out of the back of the limo holding a bag of McDonalds and two large cups of coffee in a cardboard holder. Coleman turns back to Bill.

COLEMAN

You hungry?

Coleman looks at Bill. Bill looks back at Coleman. It's a stand-off. Finally, Bill sighs deeply.

BILL

Now that you mention it, yeah, I am. My last meal was in jail and it was such disgusting slop I couldn't eat it.

COLEMAN

Yeah, jail food's bad. But after a few days you eat it anyway. After a few more days you'll steal it to get more.

Coleman takes the McDonald's food from his assistant.

COLEMAN

Thank you.  
(to Bill)  
So?

BILL

(shrugs)  
So, sure. Come on in. The place is kind of a mess right now.

Coleman and Bill go inside.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE/BACK PATIO – DAY

Bill and Coleman sit down on the patio. Coleman drinks a cup of coffee. Bill keeps drinking vodka, although he's gone back to using a cup, not straight from the bottle. Bill shakily lights a cigarette.

COLEMAN

Ain't ya gonna eat your egg McFluffy?

BILL

Maybe later.

COLEMAN

So they fired you, huh?

BILL

I guess everybody already knows, huh?

COLEMAN

If they don't they will. Bill, you got a problem.

BILL

No I don't. Everybody else has a problem. I'm fine.

COLEMAN

No you're not. You're a drunken fucked up mess. They fired your sorry ass. Where's your wife?

BILL

(coughs)

She left. She's went to our house in Florida.

COLEMAN

Is she coming back?

BILL

(shakes his head)

I don't think so.

COLEMAN

Bill, you've got a bunch of problems. And you wanna know why?

BILL

No, why? Please inform me why I've got so many problems.

COLEMAN

Easy, you drink too much.



BILL

(sighs impatiently)

But you don't know why I drink. You don't know what causes me to drink. You don't know about my pain and my broken heart.

COLEMAN

(grins)

Luckily for me, Bill, I don't give a fuck. Neither does anybody else. Listen up. It doesn't matter why you drink. I don't care if you drink. You can drink all the liquor down in Costa Rica, ain't nobody's business but your own. But Bill, I've got some bad news for you. You're a sloppy, ugly drunk, just like every other drunk I've ever met. You're not a special drunk. You're just one more drunk. Without a job and without a woman.

BILL

(lowers his head)

I've hit the bottom of the barrel.

COLEMAN

You have, brother. Take my word for it. You have.

BILL

What do you know about it anyway?

COLEMAN

I used to drink. I used to be a drunk. And a dope fiend too.

BILL

(interested)

Really? I never heard that.

COLEMAN

I kept it quiet. Back then you actually could do that.

BILL

Back when?

COLEMAN

When I was in the service, and after the war.

BILL

Weren't you a Tuskegee Airman?

COLEMAN

Yes I was. The 477<sup>th</sup> Tuskegee Bomber Squadron, located in Michigan of all places, Not Alabama. But I didn't see action, and I didn't go overseas. We were all ready to bomb the living hell out of the Nazis and Japs. Our brothers in the fighter planes, the Mustangs, the Red Tails, they kicked ass all over North Africa, Italy, and all over Europe. The Tuskegee Airmen were the most distinguished unit in the Air Force, you want to know why?

BILL

Why?

COLEMAN

Because we were black, so we had to be the best and the smartest. And against everyone's expectations, that's what we became. Even though we were black. Anyway, in the service—I was stationed right here at Selfridge Air Force Base—we took classes in navigation, learned how to fly B-17 Flying Fortresses, and learned how to sit around and wait, and drink. For two years, until the war ended, then I was discharged in '46. Well, then me and every other soldier was nervous out of the service. I was back home in swingin' Detroit City, and the war was over and I was drinkin' and partyin' and carryin' on all the time. Bill, do you remember Detroit in the late 1940's?

BILL

I was a kid, but I remember when the war ended. May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945. I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In Detroit. I graduated from Central High in the class of '49.

COLEMAN

So you felt it. It was crazy then. We won the war. Everything was all bustin' open everywhere. And Detroit was a black city run by a crooked white government. Redheaded Irish sons of bitches, Bill, all dumber than shit. But here's the point. Me and a bunch of other smart young black men I'd met in the Air Force – some of them were even Communists, Bill – saw an opportunity here in Detroit and we took it. You think we're thugs? The Cavanaugh's were thugs. The Romneys were thugs.

BILL

Yeah? So?

COLEMAN

So here's the thing, Bill, I knew I couldn't even try to do what I was thinking of doing, meaning take over a major American city, while I was drinking and doin' drugs and partying and carryin' on and acting like a fool all the time. So I cleaned up. I did it on purpose, and I did it for me. I'm forty years sober this year. My sober date is January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1949. Forty years this year.

BILL

Congratulations.

(takes a drink)

I don't want to stop drinking. I'm good at it.

COLEMAN

Hey, it's not like you have a job to go back to.

BILL

Thanks for reminding me. No. And I like to drink.

COLEMAN

Bill, I think you should drink exactly as much as you want to drink. And when you stop, or you don't stop, it'll be the right thing to do. You have to figure out your own reason. But quitting's hard. I had my daddy lock me up in his barn for a month.

BILL

(nods; drinks)

I can't quit drinking. It's impossible.

COLEMAN

(skeptical)

Really? Why not?

BILL

(confused)

What would I do instead?

COLEMAN

Get better. You're fucked up. I was fucked up. Stop with the booze and drugs and you get better. Honestly.

BILL

But I won't be who I am anymore.

COLEMAN

Right, you'll stop being a drunken fool. On TV, no less, where everybody can see you.

BILL

But they love me. I'm number one.

COLEMAN

They love you? Fuck, they just wanted to see you crash and burn. And you did. Spectacularly. And ABC fired you, and you went to jail, and your wife left you. You've achieved all your goals. Good work. Now you can stop. Because now it doesn't matter.

Bill puts down his drink. He picks up his cup of McDonald's coffee. He takes off the top and smells it.

BILL

So what are you saying? You think I should go to rehab, or some shit like that?

COLEMAN

It's got to be better than my daddy's barn.

BILL

(optimistically)

Yeah, a month at rehab would probably do me some good. And it would show them I'm serious. Then they'll give me another show. A talk show.

COLEMAN

Aren't you serious, Bill?

BILL

(nods)

Sure I am. OK, I give in, I'll be a talk show host.

COLEMAN

Well, whatever you do, I'll be a guest on your show if you ask me.

BILL

You can be my first guest.  
 (they toast and  
 clink Styrofoam  
 coffee cups)  
 Stopping drinking will be easy. If I set  
 my mind to something I always get it  
 done.

Bill and Coleman sit on the back patio drinking McDonald's coffee.

The serious Narrator returns for a news update.

NARRATOR

Bill did go to rehab for thirty days. A luxury facility in New Port Beach, California. He returned to Detroit. WXYZ Channel 7, acutely aware of the loss of Bill's former ratings, quickly creates an eleven o'clock talk show called *This Evening With Bill Bonds*. The show premieres in September of 1990. Bill's first guest was *not* the recently retired Mayor of Detroit, Coleman Young.

INT. *THIS EVENING* SET – DAY

*This Evening With Bill Bonds* has a snazzy new set with dynamic back-lighting. It's still set up like a standard talk show set, but presently all of the key lights are off, so we can only see the silhouettes of a host and a guest. This show has the same announcer as the news.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Detroit's newest talk show sensation, *This Evening With Bill Bonds*, and tonight Bill's guest is Michigan's own, Ted Nugent!

The lights come up revealing Bill in the host's seat, smoking a cigarette, and Ted Nugent, with long crazy hair and a Fu-Manchu mustache. Bill's eyes are half closed and he frequently drinks from a coffee cup.

BILL

(slurring)

After hits like *Journey To the Center of the Mind* and *Wang Dang Sweet Poontang*, come on, Ted, share it with me, share it with Detroit, share it with the whole world. What is it you really wanna do most in life?

With his goofy grin, Ted sits up straight and explains:

TED

I'm glad you asked me that, Bill, because I know exactly what I want to do.

BILL

(smiles)

What is it? Share it with me, Ted. Share it with all of us.

TED

Well, Bill, I really want to kill a black rhino with a compound bow.

BILL

(his smile fades)

Aren't black rhinos an endangered species?

TED

Sure they are, but I have a ranch in Africa, and if I pay off the right people, they'll let me do it. No problem. The system there is so corrupt.

BILL

Is that a fact?

TED

That's because they don't think I can kill a rhino with an arrow, but I can, if I hit it right in the pump.

Ted points at the place where his heart should be. Bill takes a big drink from his coffee mug. Bill looks at the lens, rolls his eyes and swirls his finger around his ear, making the international sign of coo-coo. He's drunk and bored and he can't find his mouth with his cigarette.

BILL

We'll be right back with more insights on hunting endangered black rhinos from Detroit's own, Ted Nugent.

TED

I'm actually from Redford, Bill.

BILL

That's great, Ted. Make sure to tune in next week when my special guest star will be Detroit's own, Alice Cooper, who may or may not be from Detroit. I can't wait to find out, and I'm sure you can't, either.

Bill finishes whatever is in his coffee mug. Ted's not done.

TED

The way you hit a rhino in the pump with a crossbow is from straight on, so you've got to get them coming right at you . . .

EXT. THE BROADCAST HOUSE – DAY

Everything is in place: the guard is at the gate, the walls surround the buildings and radio dishes and towers. The narrator speaks.

NARRATOR

*This Evening With Bill Bonds* lasts one season. Bill returns to rehab, cleans up, and WXYZ, unable to let a good thing go, quickly comes up with, *Good Morning, Detroit, I'm Bill Bonds!*

INT. *GOOD MORNING* SET – DAY

This is the same set as his last show, repainted and it now says on the backdrop, *Good Morning, Detroit, I'm Bill Bonds!* Bill has his eyes closed as his guest, a 30-year-old white guy with a red beard, who is an expert FISHERMAN, explains his craft.



FISHERMAN

If you grab the steelhead by the gill,  
then slice nice and even all the way  
down the throat and belly, reaching  
inside and grabbing the entrails . . .

Bill looks like he might vomit.

NARRATOR

Halfway into the first season of *Good Morning Detroit, I'm Bill Bonds!* ABC cancels the show. Bill once again goes back into rehab and cleans up.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE/BACK PATIO – DAY

Bill lies on a chaise lounge wearing shorts, sandals, and a loose-fitting Hawaiian shirt. He is drinking a can of Diet Coke. Jeanne and Phil come walking up from around from the side of the house.

JEANNE

Bill, how are you doing?

PHIL

Yeah, Billy, how do you feel?

BILL

Thirty-five days sober. Thirty days at rehab and five here at home. Couldn't be better.

(holds up the Coke)

Wanna Coke?

JEANNE

No, we were sent on a mission.

BILL

You want me back on the news?

JEANNE

No. We're here to ask if you'd be interested in doing an afternoon talk show.

Phil interjects with some enthusiasm.

PHIL

Like Mike Douglas or Merv Griffin,  
both of whom are very popular at  
the moment.

BILL

Really? You want me to compete  
with Merv Griffin and Mike Douglas?

PHIL

Everybody seems to think that afternoon  
is your perfect time slot.

BILL

Well, it's certainly not morning or evening,  
I've proven that.

JEANNE

(unconvincing)

It could work.

BILL

Yeah. Three's a charm. Since I don't  
have any friends or family any more, I'll  
call you two my friends, what'dya say?

PHIL

I'm your friend, Billy. You know that.

Bill turns to Jeanne.

BILL

What about you, Jeanne?

JEANNE

(nods)

I'm your friend . . . Billy.

BILL

You don't have to call me that if you  
don't want to.

JEANNE

Good. You don't seem like a Billy  
to me.

BILL

So, friends, what do you think I should do? Each show has been followed by a month in rehab. It's no fun failing and failing. I'm getting old. I'm nearly sixty.

Phil and Jeanne look at each other, then shrug and nod.

JEANNE

Fuck ABC, Bill. Retire. Stay sober this time. For good. Succeed.

BILL

(turns to Phil)

Phil?

PHIL

She's right. Retire. Fuck ABC. You're a newsman, Billy, and a damn good one, not a talk show host.

BILL

That's true. I'm a newsman, not a talk show host. I think I've proven that.

JEANNE

You have. You don't need to prove it again. ABC will wring you dry if you let them. You know that.

BILL

I don't even like watching talk shows. In fact, I *hate* talk shows. Fuck 'em. So no, I won't do another one. Not in the afternoon, not in the middle of the night, not in a car, not in bar.

PHIL

Good for you, Billy.

JEANNE

Yes, good for you . . . Bill.

BILL

(stands)

Let me get you guys those Cokes. Sit  
down, my friends, stay for a minute.  
Tell me all the news that's fit to print.

Bill goes over to an outdoor fridge and Jeanne and Phil both sit down on patio chairs. Bill takes out cans of Diet Coke and brings them over. They all begin to talk.

NARRATOR

When Bill Bonds, after thirty years' service, informs ABC that, for personal reasons, he won't do the afternoon talk show, ABC fires him. Bill retires from news and talk shows and manages to remain sober. Bill lives in peaceful sobriety for the next twenty-five years, becoming the pitchman for a local Detroit furniture store.

INT. FURNITURE STORE – DAY

It's a large furniture store with many couches, chairs and mattresses. Bill, now with gray hair on the sides and a gray toupee, walks forward up the aisle among the furniture.

BILL

So don't forget the hazy, lazy, dazy,  
crazy autumn sales blow-out at—

We hear the voice of the COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR.

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR (O.S.)

No, Bill, it's "Crazy, hazy, lazy, dazy,  
autumn sale." It starts with crazy, not  
hazy.

Bill stands there for a brief moment looking like he might blow a circuit, but he doesn't. Just then an attractive woman in her forties, sporting a short haircut, FLO, steps up to Bill holding a can of Diet Coke.

FLO

Here, hon, have a stiff one.

Bill inhales deeply, takes the Coke, then puts his arm around Flo's shoulder.

BILL

Thank you, darling

(sips a Diet Coke;

looks up)

No problem, I got it. Starts with crazy.

OK, let's go again, if you please, Mr.

Director.

(separates from Flo)

I'm going to nail it, watch me.

Flo walks off to the sidelines.

FLO

Of course you will, dear, you're Bill

Bonds.

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR (O.S.)

OK, let's go again. Back to one.

Bill turns around and walks back to his starting position.

BILL

(to himself)

It starts with crazy. Crazy, hazy, lazy,

dazy. Got it.

Arriving at his first position, Bill turns around, faces the camera, then reaches up to straighten his toupee.

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Don't touch the toupee, Bill, it took an

hour to get it straight.

Bill's hand freezes near his head.

BILL

Right.

(lowers his hand)

OK, everybody, no kidding, time to finish this up. Me and my lady have dinner reservations. Bill Bonds has spoken, and remember, folks, I tell it like it is.

Cut to black.